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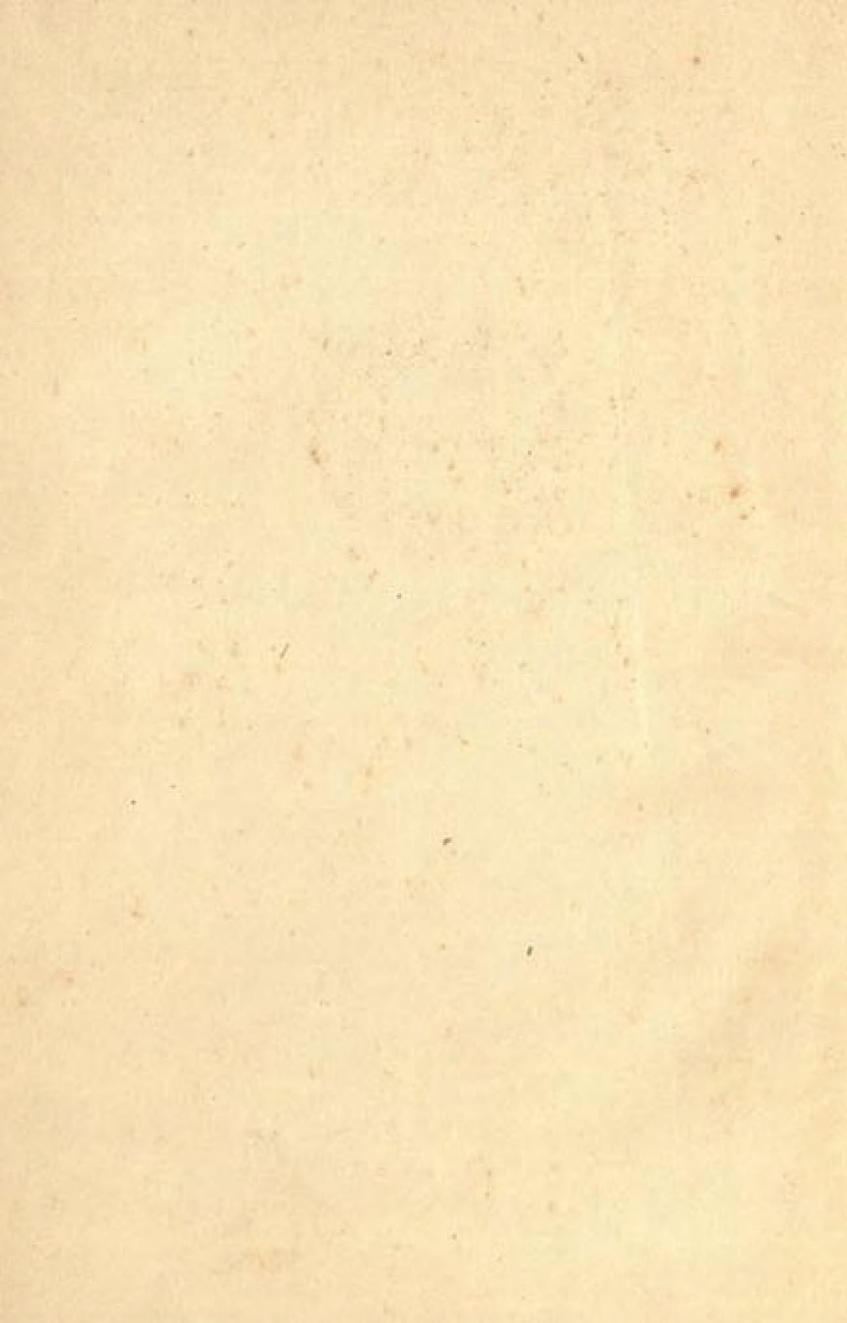
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# Sri Aurobindo Came To Me

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PONDICHERRY

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PONDICHERRY

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THE MOTHER'S PRAYER TO THE MATERIAL  
ENVELOPE OF SRI AUROBINDO

To THEE who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to THEE our infinite gratitude. Before THEE who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before THEE who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before THEE we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to THEE.

December 9, 1950

THE MOTHER



## INTRODUCTION

It is in our four capacities that I am related to this book of Dilip Kumar Roy's which I have been asked—or rather privileged—to introduce. As editor of the fortnightly review, *Mother India*, I had the delight of publishing it for the first time in serial form. I am also a friend of the author: I have known him for the last twenty three years and have valued his friendship from not only the personal standpoint but also the literary and the spiritual. Next, our friendship has resulted in a special relation on my part to his book: I actually figure in some vivid pages of it that are a most generous appreciation of me. This leads me to the fourth capacity, a pointer to which is already in the word "spiritual": we have sat at the feet of the same guru, Sri Aurobindo, in whose Ashram at Pondichery I had been for nearly a year when Dilip Kumar Roy came there, "burning his boats" behind him but bringing with him the flame which had lit that bonfire—his colourful, many-shaded, complicated, questioning, impetuous, expansive and at the same time dreamily idealistic and Krishna-haunted personality.

We had several things in common. There was the intense love of literature, especially poetry. There was also the itch

## Introduction

for writing, the urge in particular to write poems of a new beauty—what Sri Aurobindo, adapting a phrase of Meredith's, had called in *The Future Poetry* the expression of "our inmost in the inmost way". Like most people with the artistic turn we were very sensitive to the touch of earth and the deep call of the soul that had brought us here was no less a pang than a rapture, for, in our ignorance of Sri Aurobindo's all-embracing vision, it seemed to make renunciation of magic dawn and witching night and the heart-gripping loveliness that comes over things doomed to pass away, the price for the One who is infinite and eternal. Both of us had gone through emotional entanglements and had ached for the Divine after much of the bitter-sweet of human love. Then there was the pull of "career" resisted by either of us—he had the prospect of becoming a musician of note and the lime-light had already played upon him: I, with some lucky academic distinction, had looked forward to a little fame in the higher ranges of journalism. Finally, we had westernised minds which, though borne towards the spiritual life by an incalculable surge from beyond the normal self, carried a habit of controversy into even the quiet atmosphere of an Ashram of Yoga.

His intellect was indeed keyed to a different note of controversy than was mine: I was argumentative about problems like unity and multiplicity, free-will and determinism, the personal God and the impersonal Absolute, and wanted the supra-sensible to be logically of a piece,



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amenable to analytic systematisation, while he had the sceptic's hesitation to accept what he could not personally verify and the positivist tendency to lay stress on perception by the outward-looking intelligence, something of the temper of Bertrand Russell whose cautions "clear-headedness" and poised "realism" he admired. But whatever the differences, we had a restlessness of thought often pursuing us in even "the moments when the inner lamps are lit". I, however, ceased argumentation after a time: close study of Sri Aurobindo's books took me with a convincing logic as far as thought could reach and, as for what lay beyond that bourne, I was fortunate—most to my own surprise—in discovering an abundant fount of faith unsealed in my heart at the touch of Sri Aurobindo and his radiant co-worker whom we addressed as the Mother. Of course, all this did not prevent the world and the flesh from constantly tripping me up, but I escaped the long tussle my friend had with the irrepressible doubter his sojourn in the West had set up in him strangely side by side with the spontaneous devotee that was part of him from his boyhood in post-Ramakrishna Bengal and that I who was not a Hindu by race but a Parsi and a resident not of Bengal but of Gujerat could hardly expect, for all my heart's faith, to find ready-made in myself.

There were other differences too in our psychologies. He could more easily be hurt, and impulse more frequently swayed him. On the other hand, hardly mine the warm



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amplitude of his social personality, the generous diversified contacts, the rich talent for hospitable laughter and boon companionship. Although on good terms with the whole Ashram and never in the habit of considering cheerfulness unphilosophical, I was more reserved and reticent and my circle of intimates was somewhat small. But in this circle Roy took a prominent place from the beginning. Many and happy have been the hours we have spent together—the differences in our temperaments, no less than our affinities, have attracted us to each other. And it is both the differences and the affinities that in a generalised form make up the human stuff on which Sri Aurobindo is shown at wonderful work in the present book. But I never fully realised how valuable from the standpoint of the world at large were the differences till I had perused chapter after fascinating chapter Roy had penned.

Because of his expansive nature and his somewhat unguarded susceptibilities he had always struck me as being, for all his special gifts and extraordinary powers, far more representative of essential humanity on the credit as well as the debit side than people like me could be, and also therefore, by virtue of those gifts and powers, capable of a greatness in which the mass could see not a thrusting of itself somewhat out into the cold but a taking up of its substance into a more opulent, a more intense life. What I had not sufficiently seen was that a vital part of his representative character was the peculiar clash in him of

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aspects of the Russellian sceptic with those of the Ramakrishnanian devotee, the typical bent of the general consciousness on the level of scientific cerebration cutting across its typical turn on the level of religious feeling. No doubt, there are other levels—for instance, the philosophical, the sociological, the political—but the majority of men live less on them than on those of science which is organised this-world sense and of religion which is organised other-world sense. Of course, here as elsewhere in Roy, many subtle factors refine and deepen all that is ordinary, so that the sceptic or the devotee in the majority lives in him with also a keener quality; but it is their brain-throb and their heart-beat in the midst of the aspirations and inspirations of his genius, that endow his individuality with a meaning that must go home to millions at once doubting the Unknown and yearning towards it.

On a grander scale and in a sublimer sense and in a profounder way, Sri Aurobindo is also a figure whose greatness holds the promise of a world-wide consummation, one who is not a superb freak but the leader of our evolution, the *Yogi par excellence* in whom man becomes God as much as God becomes man. The coming together, therefore, of Roy the seeker and Sri Aurobindo the adept and their relationship as disciple and master were perhaps in several respects the most highly significant phenomenon, so far as the psychology of man in general is concerned, in the history of an Ashram where more spiritual energy

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is concentrated for the creation of a new earth than material energy can be packed in any atom bomb for the destruction of the old.

The book Roy has written about this coming together and this relationship is thus bound to be a powerful help to his fellow beings on the same quest as he. The artist and the thinker will find much to appeal to them, but it is more eminently a book written by an artist and a thinker for the common human soul in all its frailty of vacillating thought as well as in its instinctive certitude of the Light of lights that, seen nowhere, may yet be felt everywhere. The writing is natural, almost conversational in places, though often with a subtle gracefulness and evocative skill and mostly with a graphic touch and a tang of personality which saves even a slightly discursive tendency here and there from being unattractive. The man Dilip Kumar Roy stands out clear—at times astonishingly simple, at times peculiarly intricate—neither protected by *amour propre* nor covered by false modesty. There is a fine frankness here and, in addition, pervading the entire retrospect, an unobtrusive humility towards his spiritual mentors. Nor is the sparkle of humour absent: in fact it breaks out again and again—as indeed it cannot help doing, since Sri Aurobindo himself held that there is no lack of laughter in the Kingdom of Heaven and that the endeavour to establish that Kingdom on earth must bring with it a luminous gaiety.



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Of Sri Aurobindo's own humour Roy gives many an invaluable instance. And without those examples he could not have made complete the picture that is the main object of this book about the many-sided interplay of the human and the divine. For the humour, besides being an element of a truth-revealing sunshine of the Spirit, is part of the spontaneous close contact, the warm and happy intimacy, to which the God-realised *guru* admitted his *chela*. And it is this intimacy, implying not only the unhindered approach of the disciple but also the Master's own enfolding movement, that sets the pattern, mixes the colours and constitutes the high-lights of the picture.

The enfolding movement of the Master: this is indeed the central revelation of the book and the inspiration of its title: *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*. A limitless understanding, compassion, mercy and love flowed out to Roy from the illumined and blissful depths of Sri Aurobindo's being: they surrounded him with warmth during his moods of anguish at Yoga tearing him away from the cherished follies of ordinary life, they upbuoyed him mightily yet most tenderly when he would sink back to the gilded vanity of the old self-bound existence, they penetrated him with a light which laid bare the hollowness of the human mind's pretensions not only with the power of a guru's wisdom but with the sweet persuasiveness of a father's superior experience and at times with the confiding appeal of a friend who stands on one's own level and would share the

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lucky fruits of his labour through the years. Always the giving was done with a curious nobility as if Sri Aurobindo's need of the recipient had been much greater than the latter's call and cry for his help. Forgiveness and forbearance without end in the midst of a ceaseless holding up of the Ideal, genuine personal respect for the frequently recalcitrant disciple, patient intellectual explanation to him again and again of spiritual motives and truths, assurance of a steady unconditional love for him at all moments and, throughout, a sustaining insight into his groping human nature on the one hand and on the other into his secret soul growing towards divinity within that nature's complex terms—it is thus that Sri Aurobindo with his towering spiritual realisations and with his promise of earth-transforming Supermind came to Dilip Kumar Roy and comes through his book to the commonalty no less than to the *élite* unsatisfied with the surface of things in the modern world.

The coming is the more effective because it takes place with a large ease, a smiling reasonableness, an almost matter-of-fact clarity and a natural awareness of twentieth-century hopes and fears. There is neither hot-gossiping nor mystagogism here. Yet the inner force and urgency cannot be mistaken. On Roy's side as well as on Sri Aurobindo's, there works a deep intensity without which the book would not be the important document that it is. Roy, the Krishna-haunted soul caught in the fretful surface mind, is burning in his heart of hearts to see in Sri Aurobindo the complete



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Avatar and in the Mother the Avatar's creative spiritual counterpart: short of that seeing, his life lacks real fruition. Sri Aurobindo, the wholly integrated embodiment of a luminous Consciousness beyond the mere intellect, takes him as it were into his compassionate arms and tries to make the human heart feel the rhythm of the divine beatitude and the human mind perceive the face of divine knowledge. The inner climax of the drama is reached in an event which that heart and mind had never expected: the passing of Sri Aurobindo at the peak of his power of earth-transformation. The story of this passing and the unravelling of its inner significance as a tremendous sacrifice have been attempted elsewhere. Suffice it here to say that with the seeming sunset of Truth's presence on earth the flame in the disciple, so long shaken by doubt and contrariness, sprang up firm and full to bear testimony to that Truth: it was as if Sri Aurobindo had died to make the vision of the Godhead in him take birth in those he had loved so profoundly and for whom he had laboured to bring down a new and perfect life. The sense of that poignant "as if" is at work in the background of Roy's many-aspected presentation of his *guru's* dealings with human nature. And it is also active indirectly behind his account of his relationship with one who now stands alone to the outer eye as bearer of the Life Divine and is therefore precious in the extreme to our frail body's outstretched hands, one whom Sri Aurobindo put before us as the mighty fulfiller of his own

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mission and as the fountain of a supreme Love and Light that shall reshape the world: the Mother.

Yes, Roy's book has a deep intensity at its back and also springing into the forefront at several points and ruling from there the entire narrative. But the ruling is subtle: nowhere the art-form of a narrative that is meant to be no esoteric thesis has been vitiated. The reminiscences and the confessions run along as lightly as the high seriousness of the central theme can permit and, except perhaps for a somewhat "specialist" though valuable chapter on metrical experiments, they can be enjoyed by every intelligent reader who possesses "the upward-looking face". Glimpses of the Ashram's activity and development, portrayals of close friends, sketches of significant situations inner and outer, disclosures of both the bright and the obscure in the author's personality, reproductions of the spirited epistolary exchanges between the *chela* and the *guru*, flashings of apt anecdotes, evocations of Sri Aurobindo's rare intellectual no less than mystical genius and of the Mother's transcendent sweetness and strength—all these mingle in an unstrained manner to make an unforgettable book which can very well speak for itself and needs no introduction but which will inspire the introductory mood in every one to whom in a moving and marvellous way Sri Aurobindo came.

28-7-51

K. D. SETHNA

## PREFACE

SOMEBODY said that what is presented here is an autobiography. I hasten to contradict the statement at the very outset. I have only reminisced about my Gurudev, Sri Aurobindo, as I hope I have made clear enough in what is going to follow. An autobiography has a purpose which goes beyond the orbit of reminiscences. Besides, I have, as far as possible, confined my reactions and reflections to the great personality who induced them so as to bring out his greatness as I glimpsed it through my protracted spiritual struggles and aspirations. I have tried to give a sketch neither of his life nor of my own. It is only my interactions with him, developed in the context of an Ashram life, that I have taken up as my theme. But interactions are born of a contact of two persons. So I had to bring myself in because otherwise I could not possibly write anything worth while. I believe that what I have written is worth while not because of the part I have played in what I cannot help but call a drama, but because through my conflicts and aspirations an aspect of his incredible self comes to the fore, a self whose flowering neither our age nor circumstances could explain. That is why I have sometimes felt inclined to look upon his efflorescence as an inexplicable freak of Nature,

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not freak in the sense a genius often is, but in the sense of of an Avatar, a Man of Destiny. For I fully agree with a modern appraiser who writes, after referring to prophets "from Kierkegard down to Buber", that while men of their "calibre" may be expected "in every century", "Sri Aurobindo is an event over which Divine Providence is a thousand times more tardy".<sup>1</sup>

But even the warmest of tributes cause me, personally, a pang along with a thrill. For I know that the world cannot possibly have any full vision of the almost unbelievable greatness of one who came to us incognito and departed unrecognised by all except a handful. But then why regret? One might as well regret the impotence of the senses to conceive of interstellar space or—in the words of Sri Ramakrishna—of the "doll of salt" to plumb the ocean. The hiatus between an Avatar and the mediocre is even greater. That is why we, in India, have so grievously failed to "wake up when he came and sat close to us"—to quote an image from a poem of Tagore. Besides, as the Mother said once, in a sense everything that *has* been *had* to be and yet might have been otherwise. Sri Aurobindo has tried to explain this paradox in his various writings looking upon life as a "play of possibilities" which is, withal, essentially

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from "The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo," a paper read before the London Personalist Group on 22.6.50 by Morwenna Donnelly (printed in Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1951)



## *Preface*

predetermined. So what might have happened had we recognised him did not happen. This though a sad reflection in itself, carries a meaning perhaps too deep for thought. At all events, Sri Aurobindo has elected to withdraw for the time being from this our world of senses. But as the Mother has assured us that his spirit cannot leave us till his work is finally accomplished, we need not grieve too much "the lack of receptivity of earth and men" which (as she puts it) is responsible for the decision Sri Aurobindo has taken regarding the body.<sup>1</sup> Also, has he not said himself: "I know with absolute certitude that the Supramental is a truth and its advent is, in the very nature of things inevitable"<sup>2</sup>? We, his disciples, must believe this: whether others will follow suit—time and circumstances alone can tell. I only know that if and when they do, they will be, in part, co-operating with him and that whosoever co-operates thus must be regarded as blessed in the measure of his co-operation.

I may say a few words about our Ashram to help outsiders understand a little better what I have tried to portray.

The Ashram, as we know it, was born on a definite date: the 24th of November 1926. Before that date—since 1910,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Mother's message in the Bulletin, February 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from a letter written to me on 26.12.34 and published subsequently in his "Letters".



## Preface

when Sri Aurobindo first came to Pondicherry—only a handful of disciples had stayed as his guests and looked up to him *alone*, as the Mother was, all this time, practically invisible immersed in her *sadhana*. In those pre-Ashram days Sri Aurobindo used to talk freely with his disciples and was, besides, available to some visitors, if not all. That is why I could have long talks with him in 1924—published subsequently in my *Among the Great*. Since 1926, however, the landscape changed completely: he went into complete seclusion while she came out of hers to take personal charge of the Ashram which she has been building and organising ever since without sparing herself. All these years none but she had had free access to him. Only since 1938, when Sri Aurobindo consented to accept a few personal attendants, about half-a-dozen of his disciples were allowed to serve him. These could talk to him now and then and convey to him messages from outside. In recent years, a few visitors were, indeed, permitted to talk to him, but interviews in the ordinary acceptation of the term have been rarely allowed. But I must now come back to the Mother to complete my description of the Ashram.

For us, the disciples, she has all along been as much our Guru as Sri Aurobindo and in a sense even more so, in that, unlike Sri Aurobindo, she has always been available to us as the direct guide and helper. It is true that Sri Aurobindo wrote letters which we could ill afford to do without, but when all is said, letters could hardly be a substitute for

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personal contact and day-to-day guidance which the Mother alone could give us. Thus it will not be an overstatement to say that the Ashram as we know today could not have come into being at all had it not been for her strong personality and sheer genius for organisation since, for all practical purposes, she has remained, from its very inception to this day, the pole and pivot of our little colony of adventure and aspiration. Nothing can happen far less flourish in the Ashram except under her personal seal and sanction. Had it not been for her, the Ashram inmates could never have grown from about a score or so, in 1926, to 800, today—inclusive of men, women and children. Sri Aurobindo helped us—apart from his silent Yogic Force—only with his letters and even these decreased after 1938, so that as the years rolled on, we had to depend more and more on the Mother alone.

Now about the *Darshans*.

In the olden days—till November, 1938, to be more precise—Sri Aurobindo used to come out only thrice a year.

On 21st February, the Mother's birthday.

On 15th August, Sri Aurobindo's birthday.

On 24th November, the birthday of the Ashram.

Since 1939 another day was added: the 24th of April, the day of the Mother's coming to Pondicherry for good about thirty years ago.

The celebrations on each of these days were crowned by Sri Aurobindo's *darshan* which means in Sanskrit, a vision

## Preface

—in other words, a coming out to be seen by visitors and disciples. On the four days given above, people who wished to see him came to Pondicherry from all parts of the world. They had to form a queue along with us, the Ashram members. One by one we went up to their *sanctum sanctorum* and filed past, every visitor (or disciple) taking but a few seconds. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sat side by side and blessed each devotee as he or she approached and stood in front of them for a little before passing on. The pilgrims were neither asked nor expected to comply with any formality: the whole function was marked by a complete lack of ceremony or ritual; no one was requested to fulfil any condition except that of silence and of not standing too long gazing at Gurudev and the Mother.

Since 1940, or thereabouts, children began to be accepted in the Ashram, but only of those who had already become their disciples. It was for *them* that the sports were originally started as I have described in the last chapter of my book.

I do not think I need add anything more, except that in the Ashram men and women enjoy the same status and freedom subject only to a few rules and regulations which had to be formulated to preserve order, meticulous cleanliness and a certain amount of discipline. Those who want more information about our aims and present activities are recommended to an Ashram publication entitled, "Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram", as this booklet has been sponsored by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

## Preface

I must now acknowledge a few debts.

First, to my dear friend Keshav Poddar for according the hospitality of his esteemed Journal, "Mother India," in which my book was first published serially, and later for giving permission to print these in book-form in America.

Secondly, to my dear and kind friend, K. D. Sethna, whose penetrating analysis of my book in his Foreword has helped many to a new perspective.

Thirdly, to my painstaking friends, Norman Dowsett, Lena Dowsett, Asit Kumar Gupta, Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Somnath Maitra for many helpful suggestions and corrections.

And last, though by no means the least, to my ever-forgiving friend, Sri Krishnaprem, for not disowning me because I gave him a little publicity in these pages—a self-imposed task in which I could not help but rejoice—to his everlasting sorrow.

The dedicatory poem was translated by me in the 'thirties from my own Bengali poem. It was revised first by K. D. Sethna and then by Sri Aurobindo himself.

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM  
PONCICHERRY, INDIA

D. K. R.

May, 1951.

P.S. I owe the reader an explanation for some quotations from *Savitri* which I have claimed, on occasions, to



## *Preface*

have submitted to Sri Aurobindo in order to draw him out. My friend Sethna pointed out to me that I should have steered clear of this since at the time *Savitri* had not seen the light of day, which is perfectly true. But I quoted these passages only because they were beautifully expressed with a forcefulness and a rare economy of words I could not have achieved by myself. I feel I am justified in this because the excerpts do represent my psychological tussles at the time, even though I could not have possibly expressed these in my prose with the convincingness which these throbbing passages impart. But that is precisely why I have turned to them—to bring out into a bold relief what might otherwise loom a little shadowy.

## DEDICATION

To

SRI AUROBINDO:

I bow to thee, O Guru! How arduous is the path that you have trod!

When the soul is clouded, it is your sunshine that radiates the new dawn—of hope:

When the sterile heat of diffidence sears the heart:

When the fresh garland of adoration fades into a loveless string:

When the saltus of hope is arrested and the night of doubt closes in:

When the vision of the Far-off seems a fatuity to the inner heart, imprisoned in its skeleton-cage:

When the ray from aloft becomes wan and the soul's secret urge is broken to pieces by mortification:

In that hour your starry effulgence sheds the certitude of faith with the harmonies of your azure expanse of attainment.

When, in the pain of an unquenched thirst, tears of regret inundate the earth:

## *Dedication*

When the heavy-laden soul asks who robbed it midway  
of all that it was to achieve:

In that moment your sun quells the night and awakens  
the flute-music of a new sunrise.

And the immortal herald sings: "All that you forfeit today  
shall flash forth hereafter in deathless hues."

"But when—O when?" I ask—for masses of anguished  
darkness hurl along chasing away the last traces of light!

In that hour your summit defeats the gloom by the  
bugle-blare of its cloud-kissing light.

And your clarion sings from the summit: "I have triumphed  
over the desert to bear the laughter of blossoms in  
the secret chalice of the heart:

"I have transformed the wreck of life with the ecstasy of  
love and attained the Realisation:

"I have known the talisman that can transmute earthly  
mire into blossoms of Paradise:

"I have discovered the alchemy that kindles lead into  
gold:

"I have known the rainbow-glisten that makes tear-drops  
gleam like pearls."

In the path where thorns and weeds crowd out flowery  
fulfilment:

In the path where muddy moss stops the conch-music of  
the river polluting its crystal currents: ●

## *Dedication*

In the path where the legion menaces of Danger create  
the nightmare of despair:

In that path, O Guru, by the gift of your grace, the bleak  
brow of the desert shines with the flowers of victory.

In life's weary journey, O Guru, when your Dawn-  
Goddess descends in her Elysian chariot,

She deluges the heart's meadows with the beneficent  
flood of your snow-white nectar,

And the oracle of heavenly prophecy sounds like a familiar  
trumpet-call,

And I glimpse the advent of a new harmony in the passing  
away of the old.

At the touch of your boon-giving smile pallid dejection  
hides in shame and cascades spring forth on the driest rock.

And the dash of your sunbeams slays misty uncertainties  
and their anklets of joy ring in the dust of the stormwinds.

The voice of your fragrant zephyr rouses the sleeping  
verdure in the subterranean arbour of the soul.

And impregnated with the lotus-pollens of your message  
the heart breaks forth into immaculate buds of whispering  
worship.

In the boat of your beauteous form I aspire, in an abiding  
faith, to row across to the Shore of the Formless,

And with the compass of your blessing I cross the raging  
sea—the pole-star of your peace lighting the voyage.



## Dedication

Vain Man—with his limited vision boasts in ignorance that he wants no initiation from a Guru.

He ignores the sea and is content with the stagnant pool—an enigma indeed!

The unseen *vina* calls to him from the depths of his heart but he will not hear!

He will not put off the bandages from his eyes but joyously bathe in the slimy quagmire of darkness!

The surging waves of doubt drown his hope, the voice of the stars is extinguished—yet he will not pray for your life-giving message.

He clings, in his limited vision, to blind inordinate pride.

He seeks for the throbbing irradiation of consciousness in the pages of dead books;

He looks for the eternal in the ephemeral and the accidental.

He thirsts not for what grows with life, but runs in joy to embrace the sterilities of learning.

In his vanity he will not see that the One beyond life flowers in life in the person of the Guru.

He insults the luminous call of the Empyrean and wanders in aloof contempt of the Supreme Guide.

The Guruvadi sings his hymn round you, O Guru, seeing daily the reflection of the Impersonal in the mirror of your personality.

## *Dedication*

He seeks to worship you again and again in the temple of his soul to fashion in himself ever more faithfully the image of your perfection.

He says not that the rainbow is the shadow-form of a moment, nor that all forms are undivine.

He says not that all embodiments must needs be transient and chimerical because the incorporeal could never seek a finite mansion.

He weaves his vari-coloured garland to wed in ever-new ways the One beyond all colours.

He touches his adored image in ever-new rhythms in sleep and dream and wakefulness.

He knows that your smile, O Guru, cures all sterility and makes the stream of nectar flow unseen.

In the fane of his earthly love he lights all the candles of heavenly worship—the worship for which the universe is hungry.

He adores not the atom in the rhythm of a water-drop, for none but the infinite ocean can satisfy his soul.

The river thirsts not after the lake but only after the limitless deeps.

1870

13th March 1870

My dear Sir

I have the pleasure to inform you that

the same has been forwarded to you

and I am sure you will be satisfied with it

I am, Sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant

Yours faithfully

Wm. H. Smith

13th March 1870

13th March 1870

13th March 1870

13th March 1870

13th March 1870

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## CHAPTER I

### APOLOGIA

I MUST start with a curious apology, that I do not feel called upon to apologise for what I venture to undertake, namely, to describe not so much how Gurudev appeared to me, as how I reacted to him. For, when all is said, one can scarcely hope to delineate the beauty of a great personality in merely abstract terms with purple epithets however heartfelt these may be. One can—at least that is how I have always looked upon the truly great all my life—only portray one's own reactions to them—and even very imperfectly at that. I would go further and submit that the greater a personality is to us, the more he must elude us. Rabindranath Tagore once told me that we understand more than we think we do. To me the statement never seemed cryptic. For whenever, in my life's gropings, I have run across a truly great soul, the impression left on me has grown in height and depth with time and I have felt that I have profited by him more than I was able to assess. I can only express my helplessness if such a statement should appear obscure, or even meaningless, to some of my readers.

I can only speak of what I know, and since I am persuaded that what I do not even surmise as self-knowledge, is yet an important part of myself, I am entitled to express it



even at the risk of appearing somewhat unintelligible to many. Also I would warn my readers even when I humbly ask them to lend me a sympathetic ear—without which none can possibly hear what another has to say—that I will have, on occasions, to make such mystic statements while reminiscing about one who came into my life like a storm at once liberating and imperious; whom I courted and yet wanted to fly from; whom on numerous occasions I resisted and yet could not help clinging to; acclaimed and yet criticised with all my irreverent impetuosity; whom I accused bitterly of being aloof although even his remoteness gave me boons of intimacy and vision which no physical nearness with my dearest friends and comrades had ever been able to rival. Also I would ask them, while they appraise my statements, to do me but the bare justice of believing in my sincerity; that is, to accept it when I say that I will not be consciously untruthful or theatrical, so that all the above statements I would ask them to credit as at least representing my reactions to one whom I wanted to woo and yet felt so frantically impelled to desert that I had the temerity to write to him, on several occasions, that I had decided to end what seemed to me, in such turbid moments, a futile relationship in conditions which I found too hard to bear. One of these was that nobody must seek a private interview with him except when he himself deemed it necessary. In my spiritual crises I was, indeed, allowed to speak—even sing—to him, but it left the Old Adam in me unappeased, so much so, that sometimes I went the length of apprising him, childishly, that I was going to

leave him for good without any regret, when every beat of my heart reproached me for wanting to stifle its breath. I do not know if there has ever been such a strange relationship known to human experience where the recipient felt, time and again, that the donor had not given anything tangible and yet could not regard all the other boon-givers put together, however substantial their gifts, as more important to himself. Reason never threw any light on this enigma although I hunted after a rational clue to the mystery as dispassionately as I could. I can only say now, when the supreme giver I chafed against so often is no more, that I regard nothing that I can objectively count as an asset in my personality such as it is, as not a gift, partial or entire, of his compassion—a compassion beside which the deepest human tenderness I have known seems a mere shadow. And yet I may well speak of him, from concrete indubitable experience, as being almost on a par with “The Unseen Beloved, the Lover whom we think not of” who, even in this drab world does, sometimes, “seize on us for his own whether at first we will or no. He may even come to us at first as an enemy with the wrath of love, and our earliest relations with him may be those of battle and struggle.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Sri Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*

## CHAPTER II

### THE PILGRIMAGE

As I look back after having been havened at his feet for well over two decades, I find it still difficult to decide what it is that drew a flawed mentality like mine to one so perfect in his flowering. Was it his genius? His "face radiant with an inner realisation", as Tagore aptly put it? Or was it the recondite aura of grandeur he had woven around himself in his self-chosen seclusion? Or was it a sense of power he inspired which overwhelmed so many through the silence that crystallised around him speaking eloquently of things beyond our ken? Or was it the ocean of peace in which he seemed to float like Narayana calling to us, mortals, who clamoured for peace and yet outlawed it, a tragedy he wrote about subsequently in his epic, *Savitri*:

"A secret enmity ambushes the world's march;  
It leaves a mark on thought and speech and act;  
It stamps stain and defect on all things done;  
Till it is slain peace is forbidden on earth!"

Or was it his deep diagnoses of the maladies of our age that inspired confidence in his power to heal them?

I cannot answer even now with certitude. A time was



when I might have—when I was a votary of reason. But not now, when much of my proud faith in the human intellect has worn off after years of hopeless struggles with one who was so supremely equipped against “my intellectual ideas and rationalism” as I used to put it to him self-importantly. The result is that, in the end, I feel myself utterly at sea when I ask myself as to how I am to appraise his unfathomable personality? Did I ever truly know why I did not only come to him as a bee to rose, but clung to him in spite of myself when, in my wrong moods, I told myself that the rose had long been drained of its honey? Could a pointless seclusion like his gain him any concrete power that was going to influence events or give a lasting refuge of rational hope in these turbulent times of hot passion and murderous instincts? I found it difficult to believe this. For all that I did believe—which I find difficult to explain believing as I still do in reason (as a counsellor if not as an adjudicator) and feeling uneasy about blind acceptance of tenets which the credulous too often equate with faith and the faithful with loyalty. And the strangest thing was that in spite of my malaise I should have so seldom really missed my anchorage which had once held me fast to my old harbour of faith in humanity and reason when demon forces raised storms calling to irresistible mass-suicide! Is this explicable on any basis except that the strange Pilot had weaned me from my old moorings and steered my boat into a new harbour which protected me even when I did not know how. And as I believed this in spite of myself, could I have been far wrong in inferring that one had more knowledge than



one consciously believed? In other words, could I, if I had been really what I believe myself to be, have clung to him in spite of the deep reluctance of the rational part in me or felt so unaccountably moved by his exhortation:

“O mortal, bear this great world’s law of pain,  
In thy hard passage through a suffering world  
Lean for thy soul’s support on Heaven’s strength,  
Turn towards high Truth, aspire to love and peace.  
A little bliss is lent thee from above,  
A touch divine upon thy human days:  
Make of thy daily way a pilgrimage.”<sup>1</sup>

In fine how could I have turned to him as I did, if my heart had not really responded to a call such as this, a call which the strictly intellectual reasoner in me could never have even dreamed of taking seriously?

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book VI Canto II

## CHAPTER III

### REORIENTATION

It was Tagore who first told me that even as a child he had been imbibing things which had to lie for a long time deep ensconced in his subconscious as seeds before they could come to full flowering. He told me, as I have recorded elsewhere, that some of the best things in life work in us as an invisible influence, as for example the inspiration of woman in her totality. "Woman's function in life," he said, "is not really confined to the physical plane: she is indispensable to man's mental creation as man is to her physical. It is only because on the mental plane she works from behind the screen that we do not visualize her contribution. But that is only because we are unimaginative."<sup>1</sup> This he had expressed with a mystic charm all his own in one of his immortal songs which I translated into English a few years before his death:

I know: no single prayer of love, by life begun,  
Though unsustained;  
No bud before it blossomed on the earth fell—wan  
And shadow-stained;

<sup>1</sup> *Among the Great* (American Edition), pp. 219-220.

No ill-starred rill that pathless in the desert ran—  
Was lost, O Friend!

Nothing, I know, that aches for its hour of bloom  
—shall wait

Ever in vain;  
And all in me that's still unborn—inviolates,  
Trembles amain  
In music on thy harp-strings, Lord, beyond the fate  
Of muted pain.

I well remember how, in the first flush of our youth, this idea of the subconscious storing up all our seemingly forgotten impressions came to us, from the West and swept us off our feet. As a result we felt a glow of rapture from our new-found knowledge. For the idea used to be more than an interesting theory in ancient India: in our Yogic knowledge of old it had been accepted almost as a truism from the very start. I have dealt with this exhaustively in my mystic novel, "Upward Spiral", where I have endeavoured to explain the wealth of associations and implications that have crystallized around our famous words like *samskara*, *upadhi*, *praktan* etc. I would not care to enlarge on that theme all over again. I refer to it here only to state that it was Sri Aurobindo who first told me that this was no new idea but a part of the hoary Yogic lore of India. I can still recall how he startled me, in the early thirties, by first bringing it home to me that this modern penchant of the Western psycho-analysts for dis-

secting and explaining everything through the scalpel and microscope of the subconscious, however commendable as the first attempt of psychological research of the deeper kind in the West, could not possibly go far until, that is, it began to take stock of the Yogic way of observing ourselves and change its *modus operandi*. "I find it difficult", he wrote to me, "to take Jung and the psycho-analysts at all seriously when they try to examine spiritual experience by the flicker of their torch-lights,—though perhaps one ought to, for half-knowledge is a powerful thing and can be a great obstacle to the coming in front of the true Truth. No doubt, they are very remarkable men in their own field; but this new psychology looks to me very much like children learning some summary and not very adequate alphabet, exulting in putting their a-b-c-d of the subconscious and the mysterious underground super-ego together and imagining that their first book of obscure beginnings (c-a-t=cat. t-r-e-e=tree) is the very heart of the real knowledge. They look from down up and explain the higher lights by the lower obscurities; but the foundation of these things is above and not below: *upari budhna esham*. The Superconscient, not the subconscious, is the true foundation of things. The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above. The self-chosen field of these psychologists is, besides, poor, dark and limited; you must know the whole before you can know the part,



and the highest before you can truly understand the lowest. That is the province of the greater psychology awaiting its hour before which these poor gropings will disappear and come to nothing." In another letter he wrote to me in reply to a question of mine about Eddington's *'Science and the Unseen World'*: "The part about the changed attitude of modern science to its own field of discovery is interesting. The latter part about religious experience I find very feeble; it gives me the impression of a hen scratching the surface of the earth to find a scrap or two of food—nothing deeper."

I am enlarging on this stray view of his with a definite motive: I must remind my readers that I have set out to portray, among other things, such of my reactions to my Master as are likely to prove profitable to those who have a spiritual opening and yet cannot accept the loud lead given by any vociferous Guru. I appreciate their difficulty which is genuine enough as I myself used to fling at my Guru time and again when I argued animatedly against *Guruvada* in his own citadel. Many people are today terrified at the prospect of deifying the Guru because having contacted some fake Guru in India, they dread, if not abhor, the idea of being dictated to or halted by arbitrary 'Thou-shalt-nots' of obsolete formalism. That is, as I wrote to him once, the main reason why the *Zeitgeist* of today is definitely ranged against the traditional type of *Guruvada*—because it is an authoritarian imposition from above, not a willing acceptance from below. He wrote back that he knew this "spirit of the age" very well with

which he used even to agree, once upon a time. But he realised subsequently the truth behind *Guruvada* and so, he added, "I who had once been up in arms against *Guruvada* had later to become a Guru, in spite of myself. Such is fate." But to come back to the theme of my orientation in the direction of *Guruvada* to which I had to capitulate under protest.

When I first arrived at the Ashram, in 1928, I was given to understand by some neophytes—there were only about eighty of us in those days—that one must never even dream of questioning any law laid down by our Gurus, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This made me very unhappy till I began to have regular weekly conversations with the Mother. I found her so sweet and kind and catholic in her views that one day I asked her, at a venture, why she who was so lovable wanted us to "fear" her. "Fear!", she exclaimed in genuine astonishment. "What an idea! We only want the attitude of simple trust a child has vis-à-vis its parents."

I was at once pacified because I have been all my life a rebel by temperament. My flaws of character are doubtless legion, as my countless enemies will agree in full-throated unison, but I doubt whether even the doughtiest among them could at any time dub me a timid man and yet retain his reputation as a reliable judge. The point I want to make is that I found the very idea of fearing the Guru intolerable. Unfortunately, however, it was in the air: at least many of the proselytes I met said 'hush' whenever I enquired why our Gurus had laid down such and such

laws, or issued certain general injunctions in the Ashram. (The atmosphere improved considerably in this respect as the number of inmates increased till, today, there is hardly any fear anywhere in the Ashram. But about this I will have to write at some length later on.) This made me indeed feel unhappy till the Mother assured me one day that she had had to frame some rules simply because no institution could possibly be run or any kind of corporate life be held together without some laws laid down for general guidance. "But", she added categorically with a simple disarming smile which I could never love enough, "I do mean it when I say that I would have *no* rules at all if the Ashram could be run without them. But I am wide-awake and have always held that all rules should come from within. So I never consent to formulating more rules or codes of general conduct than are absolutely necessary and minimum." I have put it doubtless in my own language, but as this has been all along the invariable norm of her conduct, in ideal leavening practice, I cannot possibly have misrepresented her here.

About Gurudev this was even more demonstrably true. And how I discovered this with glee and exploited his leniency with alacrity! But what I want to emphasise is that as days passed in our peaceful retreat under the aegis of the two star-like souls who took charge of our welfare, material as well as spiritual, I felt more and more at ease in the Ashram atmosphere, in spite of its obvious cloistral limitations. And the more I argued with Gurudev the less ill-at-ease I felt, no matter what I said or wrote



to him and in what tone—in so much that, in the end, he seemed often to invite me to forget as it were that he was our Guru when I, emboldened by his invitation, started criticizing him as one would criticize a friend in a tête-à-tête or a colleague in an informal debate. This made many people aghast in the Ashram as well as outside: e.g. my dear friend and mentor Sri Krishnaprem from Almora took me once very seriously to task for it. “You write that you have sometimes ‘gone for Sri Aurobindo!’ You must not. *Of course* he will not mind. He sees the jewel in the lotus and can smile at your criticism but *you* mustn’t do it. Even in thought you mustn’t criticise him. It all springs from the desire to have things one’s own way. He is your Guru and in the first place, it is sheer ingratitude to criticise one who has shown you the light, and in the second, the Guru is inseparable from Krishna. He is the one who has shown you the Light and your whole life can be no repayment for such a gift. Even if you were to spend the rest of your life with no further ‘experience’ at all, you would be utterly wrong if you refused to give yourself to him. As far as I know he does not ask for blind obedience from his disciples (at least so I gather from your letter) but one must never criticise even when one can’t follow. If one could understand everything one’s Guru said, then there would be hardly any need for a Guru at all.”

I cannot honestly deny that here he was right. But can I with equal honesty own that I am really repentant for having again and again committed the misdemeanour he



so strongly reprimanded? I will go further and presume to ask my own heart whether I have not had a deeper vision of Gurudev's greatness through having been led by him, almost unawares, to fence with him as one would with an equal? And then could it have been at all possible for such as we to have dared him thus to duels had he not himself, in his infinite indulgence, consented to the thrust and parry with such inept tyros? Apropos, I am reminded of a letter which a colleague of mine wrote to him once in a light vein:

"But what disciples are we of what a Master!" wrote Nirod in one of his beautiful chastened moods. "I do wish you had called and chosen some with a better native stuff, like Krishnaprem, for instance!"

His rejoinder was characteristic:

"As to the disciples, I agree. But would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly solve the problem. And would they consent to follow my path?—that is another question." But the crux of the difficulty as he himself saw it, was expressed rather trenchantly in the very next, the third, query: "And if they (these might-have-been disciples with the better stuff) were put to the test, would not the common humanity reveal itself? That is still another question."

I know to my cost—and I speak here as a spokesman for the rest—how disconcertingly and obstinately common, even banal, this stuff turns out to be when probed deep enough by the revealing ray which comes down in answer

to the agonised prayer, in each of us, of the "bleeding piece of earth".

But this cannot be dealt with before a picture of the Ashram life—as it evolved before me, day by day, from 1928 till today—is achieved. It will not be an easy task: nevertheless it must be attempted at this stage.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ASHRAM: THE CALL

BEFORE I launch into the difficult task of setting down my various reactions to the Ashram-life that opened before me in 1928, I must endeavour to portray my deep-rooted dread of such a life prior to my being plunged into it overnight by a mysterious force which was at once too tangible for me to be dismissed as an airy nothing and too indefinable to be grappled with by my pre-yogic mentality, acclimatised to a world of ponderables. For this it is necessary to go back a little even at the risk of becoming frankly autobiographical.

I was born in one of the most aristocratic Brahmin families of Bengal. My father's mother, I have been told, traced a direct and verifiable descent from the saintly Adwaita Goswami, one of Sri Chaitanya's chief helpers and loyal intimates. My father's father, Diwan Kartikeya Chandra Roy, was a Prime Minister of one of the noblest and most ancient States of Bengal. Apart from the position he enjoyed, his honesty and strength of character were legendary: for his honesty the Prince once offered him a munificent reward which he declined because, he said, he could not possibly accept a reward for having done his bare duty. He was, besides, a bold free-thinker and wrote an auto-

biography which shocked many when it saw the light, nearly a century ago, because therein he not only blatantly testified to his apostasy by saying that he could not believe in a good Sentinel watching over this incorrigible universe, but also vented openly his admiration of the *mlechcha* (unclean) English and his partiality for their culture in toto—so much so that he began to drink regularly, though moderately, to attest the utter sincerity of his admiration of their cultured ways. (Later he gave up drink in a day for good when he saw the Young Prince drinking too much, following his example). He was a man of such uncompromising honesty that he was willing to face public obloquy, if not ostracism (for it was difficult to ostracise a princely Prime Minister of a noble Prince, whose ancestors had made history) rather than disavow his reasoned convictions. In my boyhood days I used to hear a great deal, from my father and his friends, about his incredible incorruptibility and outstanding integrity of character.

My father, Dwijendralal Roy, who took after my grandfather, was a remarkable personality and a brilliant scholar. He went to England on a State scholarship, returned with a diploma from Cirencester, was appointed a Deputy Magistrate under the British whose overlordship he cordially hated and ridiculed in his historical dramas which earned for him the title of the greatest dramatist of India. I could willingly go on writing about his versatile genius and literary attainments but since that would be going beyond the purview of my undertaking, I must content myself with mentioning only such of his qualities as bear upon my theme.



My grandfather's robust uprightness and agnosticism had cast, in the eighties, an ineffaceable influence on his precocious son's avid, adolescent mind. His stay in England only deepened this trend he had imbibed from his idol. No wonder he came back from England an avowed atheist, a fiery free-thinker and an impatient iconoclast rolled into one. As, however, he was not a Prime Minister, he could be, and promptly was, excommunicated by his relations. Nothing daunted, the rebel committed another and an irrevocable indiscretion, thus practically burning his boats: he married my mother, the eldest daughter of a widow who had married a second time! Having now little more to lose and even less to fear, he went on squibbing our Hindu piety and formalism in his comic songs and satirical poems which won him quick and lasting fame. I was at the time still in my teens.

Being congenitally fond of laughter, I laughed indeed with him even when he transgressed what seemed to me the limits, as, for example, when he did not exclude even the Gita as a target for his pasquinades. Of course he had nothing against the Gita itself but he simply could not help going all out for those who lived an unclean life and yet made a fetish of the Gita in season and out. This I found very enjoyable and I remember how my sister and I used to sing merrily with him as the irreverent rollicked in laughter: (I give here a translation of only eight lines from his celebrated lampoon):

If I humbug the world to the top of my bent,  
Steal, swindle, blaspheme or perjure,

'Twill all be absolved by dint of the Gita,  
All ills of the flesh she can cure.  
There can be no scriptures, O friend, like the Gita,  
Let's live with her name on our lips!  
Glory to thee, O Gita, my angel,  
Whose magic nought else can eclipse.

But even when I did enjoy such irresistible songs I could not go all the way with him in decrying religious ardour, having already at thirteen come under the influence of two direct disciples of Sri Ramkarishna Paramhansa: Swami Brahmananda, the founder of Ramakrishna Mission, and "Sri Ma" the famous chronicler of the Avatar. I cannot here possibly enlarge any more on my father's great though somewhat enigmatic personality—since he composed some of the greatest hymns in the Bengali language (to Krishna, Shiva, Kali, Ganga, Sri Chaitanya, etc.) which he sang often with tears of ecstasy in his eyes. But one thing I must make clear at this stage—to obviate misunderstanding.

In my summary description of my two immediate forbears, I may have unwittingly encouraged my readers to form a somewhat wrong notion about the part the deeper spiritual forces had played in moulding their lives. From what I have written, those who do not know well the best Indian minds may think that there is, in the last analysis, hardly any basic difference between these and those others who have been successfully westernised and completely insulated from India's ancient spiritual influences by the

modern European outlook on life, as has happened—to give a typical contemporary example—with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In other words, they may conclude, misled by our modern slogans, that the best minds among us may, like him, achieve a lasting harmony only under the tutelage of the West. Such a view would be not only utterly unsound but demonstrably false. The best Indian minds, however effectually inseminated by the doctrines of Western materialism, can never find any true sustenance at the fount of visionless agnosticism and soulless science.

At the same time there is much debris we have to clear before we can reach the pure fount of spiritual wisdom we thirst for. My father felt this deeply no less than my grandfather had, in his day. Nevertheless they did not, in the last resort, throw away the baby along with the bath water. That was the reason why my father had nothing but approval for my adoration of Sri Ramakrishna even when he satirized the degenerate ritualism of superstitious Hindus (I translate again):

O cling, my brothers, to this our faith,  
Like leeches stick to your station,  
No others can a like harbour be  
Nor pledge such swift salvation.  
Think! are you a thief, or robber? then just  
In the holy Ganges you dive;  
Are you a sinner? then tramp to Gaya  
Or Kashi or Puri and thrive.

The point I want to make is that, when all is said and done, there is something in the submerged depths of the authentic Indian nature which cannot open permanently to any gospel other than that of the spirit which yearns for what is native to it and lastly, responds to it no matter how high the stakes may prove.

Apropos, I am reminded of a striking remark of Lowes Dickinson, the famous rationalist who, after touring the Far East, wrote that neither Japan nor China was incomprehensible to the Western mind: it was only in India that he had been held up as before something utterly alien, even terrifying, to the Occident! And that is precisely why Pandit Jawaharlal finds Hindu culture so foreign, even bizarre, and fails to understand the diverse ways in which its religious spirit has helped humanity, a failure which prompted Sri Aurobindo to write to me (commenting on a few excerpts I had sent him from Panditji's views on religion):

"I do not take the same view of the Hindu religion as Jawaharlal. Religion is indeed always imperfect because it is a mixture of man's spirituality with his endeavours that come in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. Hindu religion appears to me as a cathedral-temple half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in detail but always fantastic with a significance—crumbling and badly outworn in places but a cathedral-temple in which service is still done to the Unseen and Its real Presence can be felt by those who enter with the right spirit...



"As for the other question—about the truth behind Hinduism—I can only say what to my view is the truth behind Hinduism, a truth contained in the very nature (not superficially seen of course) of human existence, something which is not the monopoly of Hinduism but of which Hinduism *is* the noblest expression."

Lowes Dickinson and Pandit Nehru never felt this because neither could command "the right spirit". The reasons for this, however, would take me beyond the scope of my book. So to resume.

Unlike the typical positivist mind I have just referred to, I felt that I had a congenital streak of the mystic which Dickinson dubs incomprehensible and Jawaharlal medieval. So I was not only willing but eager to play for higher stakes—"to live dangerously" as Nietzsche has put it. But as days passed, I could neither perceive the call nor find a way to give a practical shape to my ideal. I was all but ready to "take the plunge" but where was the calling, haunting deep? And what is more, might not one hope to chance even upon a raft, if not a boat, when one felt helpless against the army of waves? That was the question I had to find an answer to once and for all.

An Ashram, a spiritual centre, a nucleus of aspirants? But being a born individualist, with love of freedom bred in my bones, I was scared at the prospect of having to live in a colony, in comparative seclusion under conditions which might prove more stringent than I could bear. Suppose I did not agree with the *sadhakas*? Suppose my Guru

asked me to abide by rules I found impossible? Suppose I found it cramping—the monotony of the same task—round repeated day after day, year in and year out? All sorts of speculations seethed in my brain like irrepressible bubbles till, finally, I decided that we, moderns, could not possibly find spiritual fulfilment through such a cheap escapist device, which, besides, had been tried in antiquity and found wanting.

And yet where and how else could one translate in daily life one's ideal of one-pointed *sadhana* (self-discipline), so indispensable to a spiritual aspirant after the all-transfiguring experience? The world, as I saw it, if not actually hostile, was certainly indifferent to all spiritual endeavour which could only attain fruition after an arduous effort at self-purification under the wise and beneficent guidance of a Godlike Master. But the strange thing was that while I yearned for the guidance I also dreaded the conditions under which alone it could become fruitful in the actual field of action, Yoga. I clearly saw that this would never do, and yet—the prospect of living cabined and cribbed, jostling against the same people day after day and taking orders from one I would not be able to approach, even to talk to—nay, I shuddered at the very thought!

But I had made one mistake, and a very serious mistake at that, as I came to realise later. This I must try to explain at some length if only to be intelligible.

I had come to realise, by and by, that in the present world at least, one could not possibly live like the mendicant of old, living on alms and trusting to the Unseen Providence

to help keep our body and soul together, simply "giving all one had to the poor" and following a *phantom*, as my realist reason called it derisively. One must have an organisation of some sort where one might reasonably hope to be able to live in comparative security in some sort of harmony with one's environment.

But I felt dubious about my ability, first, to run in harness with a motley number whose susceptibilities were unlikely to leave mine alone, and secondly, to find a living inspiration from the guidance of a Guru who was all but unapproachable. For Sri Aurobindo in those days used to be very strict: he saw none. Only the Mother had access to him and brought the disciples his messages and instructions from time to time. In those days, in 1928, he did not even write letters except occasionally. (It was only after 1930, I think, that his correspondence began to assume serious proportions and grew month after month as the number of *sadhakas* increased, till in the end he had to write letters from 9 p.m. till 5 a.m. the next morning, and this went on every night for eight consecutive years, without respite!)

But my grave mistake was that I had counted without the Mother. It was perhaps not quite inexcusable, in those days I mean, for though in virtual charge of the Ashram, she not only acquiesced in receding to the background but welcomed it. Only the disciples knew her and appreciated her importance: outsiders or prospective initiates like myself were mostly left guessing. I can well remember my first impressions in 1928; I had indeed been drawn to her but I could not seriously think of surrendering myself



to her: I accepted her as my Guru but only because Sri Aurobindo had wanted me to. So far as I was concerned she became, indeed, my guide for practical purposes but my heart had been given to Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo *alone*.

Is it any wonder then that I should have entertained the misgivings I did? How could one possibly practise Sri Aurobindo's Yoga with the Mother, if not outside one's purview, at least thrust out to an unimportant niche where she could only be bowed to perfunctorily? It was much later that I came to realise—slowly, through deep tussles with my ego—what the Mother's role was in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. I had taken her initially as my guide and I did indeed admire her genuinely, but it never once occurred to me that she could possibly mean to us, *sadhakas*, what Sri Aurobindo's magic figure did from the very start; an anchorage to cling to as well as a call to the shoreless. I had, besides—I am truly ashamed to own this but I must be truthful—a sort of deep-ingrained notion that a woman could never be a spiritual Guru except at one remove as here. I know the Mother will not only forgive me for expressing such an opinion, but will be the first to smile at the pretentiousness of my masculine vanity. But one cannot very well claim to be at the start what one can only aspire to become—and that only after long wrestles with one's foolish ego with its raw notions about the world and things—and so I need not, I hope, be too repentant about my green inexperience which fathered my masculine sense of superiority.



But it is one thing to be conscious of one's congenital handicaps and quite another to get rid of these. The first step, however, is to grow conscious. This I learnt from the Mother herself who told me, the very first thing, that in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga one had to aspire intensely and sleeplessly to the consciousness of what we were in every strand of our being—to become keenly aware, that is, how far we were from what we had to become. She told me also—what I had never heard before I met her—that the very act of consciousness was in a way a movement in the direction of transformation. It sounded to my ears a little queer albeit strangely convincing because I took her to mean (by a simile which occurred to me) that it was as if the right diagnosis itself brought automatically the right medicines! But that is another story. I must strive in this chapter to portray the Ashram life as I saw it and came to love more and more in spite of myself till my attitude almost coincided with Krishnaprem's who wrote to Mother, years later: "How deeply I feel the privilege you gave me in allowing me to share freely in the Ashram life and the love you radiated on one who had come, if not exactly critical, yet with a certain reserve. What I came with has been left behind what I have been given in exchange will always remain."

I saw and talked to Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1924. I have given a faithful record of my conversations with him in my *Among the Great*. I have described there the magnetic pull I felt directly I came in contact with his radiant personality. But I did not adequately describe something else: he induced in me often enough a peace

and bliss that did "pass all understanding". I remember how I simply sat alone in silent causeless ecstasy for hours and hours, especially after a contact with him however fleeting. To think that even a momentary glimpse of him, after standing in a long weary queue, could father such spells of the most marvellous bliss! It was years ago but I can even today recapture my first experience of the kind as if it happened only yesterday! I may as well say something about it in a few words though I wonder if it will mean anything to those who have never had *the experience*.

Let me own at the outset that I have never visioned anything out of the common while or after seeing him or even talking with him—as has happened with many another. And how often have I bitterly regretted that he did not (as I put it to him ignorantly then) grant me so much as a glimpse of a miracle star or a flash of light or some form of ether and flame, as had fallen to the lot of so many and so frequently! I could almost see my fat self-esteem melt away under my nose as, time and time again, they came—these who were not even his disciples—and recounted to me in thrilled voices, what they had seen! Could I, after such repeated discomfitures, help bearing him a grudge as it were for having conjured up nothing for me to glimpse as I contemplated his marvellous face of calm and light? Nothing of the sort I had looked forward to ever happened, I saw nothing in full consciousness, then or afterwards, which I could sing hallelujah to in a triumphant accent.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I must qualify this statement. After Sri Aurobindo's passing—with Mirabai's advent—things did indeed begin to happen to me

Nay, I was no authentic mystic, I said to myself with a sigh, not even a clairvoyant, woe is me!

But mystic or not, I did feel something, sometimes, which might have been acclaimed by me as equally startling if not miraculous had not my preconceptions led me to focus my expectation on something entirely different—something I missed and therefore regretted, regretted and therefore repined, repined and therefore blamed myself till, at the end of the logical sequence, I decided, with a pang in my heart, that I was a fellow too matter-of-fact by temperament to be declared passport-worthy to the Treasurer of the apocalyptic thrills of Yoga.

But something did come through—something at least as unforgettable as what my Guru humorously dubbed “yogic miracles”. What happened was that I felt that wherever I looked dripped bliss—sheer, unqualified, flawless bliss and what amazed me was that I could not trace its genesis in any shape or form. And once it was so intense and unwaning, this all-pervasive bliss, that I could not help feeling a little intrigued in the midst of my causeless rapture and asked myself how I would describe it if a friend were to drop in and cross-examine me as to its exact nature. A curious question formulated itself instantly (I was sitting intoxicated on the beach alone): “What is it that a human being loves most in life?” The answer burgeoned at once,

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which I may well characterise as apocalyptic—phenomena which, like Mira’s speaking to me, though miraculous, are so concrete as to be compelling. But of these the time has not come for me to speak.



equally from nowhere, voiced by my heart in ecstasy: "Air and light". And startled, as though my heart had suddenly developed a tongue, I heard it say to my imaginary cross-examiner in a voice deep with intoxication: "Well, what I feel is something that can enable me not to miss even light and air, supposing somebody kept me in a dark underground cell for the rest of my life."

A strange question and a strange answer! And what is perhaps stranger still is that the experience was repeated several times in my Ashram life though it did not last as long as it did when it possessed me for the first time: for full two days and a half.

But miraculous though it may sound to believers, hard-baked rationalists are unlikely to be impressed by this response which culminated so often in ecstasy. But as Gurudev has shown us by his luminous life how to live up to the supreme teaching of the *Karma-yoga* of the Gita: "You have right to works but not to fruits thereof," so without taking cognizance of the rational explanations of omniscient psycho-analysts who would explain it all away by word-spinning—like auto-suggestion, wish-fulfilment, hypertrophy of human or religious sensitiveness and what not—I would just recapitulate here a vivid experience I had on the 15th of November, 1928 in Lucknow: in other words, the antecedent call whose cumulative effect invoked the subsequent response. Those who have never experienced "a call", as mystics put it, may not find it convincing, but those who know something about spiritual verities will not, I am sure, find my description uninteresting in spite of the



inadequacy of my penmanship. I only regret that I will have to put it briefly because to tell it as I should would require too much space. Let this much of apology suffice as a prelude to what I may well call a miracle, in that it led me to decide in five minutes on a step which changed the whole course of my life. It happened like this.

When I left Sri Aurobindo in 1924—as I have described in my *Among the Great*—he did, in effect, reject me calling my seeking a mere “mental” one. I was indeed cut to the quick but I simply had to wait till I might develop in me the strength I then lacked to cut the Gordian knot, to exploit a vivid if a well-worn metaphor.

But, as it turned out with me, I did not find that mere waiting helped; rather it increased my deep reluctance to take refuge in him unconditionally. Besides, I had felt anything but at my ease in the silent atmosphere in and about the Ashram. I was still too social and merry a free-lance to relish the prospect of capitulating overnight to the grim Justiciary of Yoga, as I often put it in my care-free irreverence. I knew indeed that I was a seeker, but a seeker still vowed to Reason as his conscience-keeper. The motto of the great Paul Valérie still rang in my ears: “Bacon dirait que cet intellect est un idol. J’y consens, mais je n’en ai trouvé de meilleur.”<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, my father’s mysticism recurred to me: the devotional songs he had composed towards the end of

<sup>1</sup> Bacon would say, this intellect is an idol. I agree, but I have yet to find a better one.

his life I often sang now in a moved voice and with a deepening nostalgia (I translate here the closing lines of one of these):

My day is done...a truce to chaffering...  
My debts are paid...I hear footfalls of Night...  
World-weary now, to thee, O Mother, I cling:  
Grant me thy lap where the dark dissolves in white.

My grandfather also: had he not turned eventually from agnosticism to God-reliance? Had he not said on his death-bed that he did not want to be consoled, since the One who had provided for him so well in this world would surely take equal care of him in the next!

But, unlike them, I was in a peculiar position, a dilemma: on the one hand I was called to cut away from my moorings here and now while, on the other, I had not yet won anything which I might hold on to; so I hesitated and suffered till, in the end, I blurted it out to a friend who has since departed this life. He gave me a quizzical smile and said: "I will buy a ticket for you tomorrow; make straight for your Guru's Ashram where you belong. Surrender all you have and are to him."

"It's all very well to suggest remedies"; I demurred ruefully. "But are you sure of the diagnosis?"

Being a medical man he smiled appreciatively. Then he looked straight at me and asked: "What is the trouble?"

"I wish I knew", I answered bitterly. "I only know that I am groping and suffering in deep darkness. My Guru

has not given me anything tangible yet. Surely you don't expect me to give up everything for nothing?"

His face fell.

"Dilip," he said, after a pause, "you have been weighed and found wanting. You are *bargaining* with the Divine! *Quid pro quo?*<sup>1</sup> This is not the spirit which had moved those who staked their all in the past for the All-in-all. I was mistaken in you."

The shaft went home....The whole night I could not sleep: I was bargaining!...bargaining!...bargaining...I felt small in my own eyes....And yet I could not take the plunge.

The next morning I sat down to meditate. I prayed to Gurudev as never before. Suddenly, when I found the pain in my heart unbearable, something happened. I cannot explain what it was but I felt that this time it was *he* who came to me.

I got up and took the next available train—in twenty minutes—to Bombay en route for Pondicherry after despatching him a telegram.

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Mother told me, on November 22nd, that I had had a sudden psychic opening and so I had heard his call.

But I have done it—a dramatic indiscretion—even though I can truthfully claim that I have not been guilty of

<sup>1</sup> Something for something.

any overstatement. My watchful and reticent friend Krishnaprem will doubtless take me to task again. But since I have let the dramatist in me have a free hand I shall be indulgent and let the footlights remain yet awhile. After all I am an artist by necessity and the artist must harbour an actor—till at least he die to art to be reborn to Yoga—an enemy within the gates, I concede, but still dear to the artist if not to the Yogi.



## CHAPTER V

### THE ASHRAM: THE TRIALS

WHEN I arrived in Pondicherry on that memorable morning of November 22nd 1928, the number of the disciples staying permanently in the Ashram was round about eighty, if my memory does not fail me. (We are 800 now.) I do not remember what was the proportion of women among us but it could not have been less than twenty-five per cent. There were no children then. Our Ashram courtyard generally basked in a delectable silence which receded progressively as the inmates increased and brought in with them children and more children who were accepted. But this did not happen till recently—during the last five or six years, I think.

The noiseless tenor of our lives was not marred appreciably till after 1940 or maybe even later. Before that we were really a serious crew, the bulk as impeccably grave as one could wish. (I am not exactly afraid of blasphemy, so I ardently hope that if the incorrigibly cheerful and social cenobite Dilip found the Ashram a little difficult to be at home in in those days, the sombre Lord of Yoga will excuse him in view of the supreme fact that the merry-andrew in him did die progressively day by day albeit under protest.)

But that was only one side of the picture. The other was entirely consonant with my temperament. There were no strict taboos, no formalism far less ritualism and we simply luxuriated in freedom. Anybody could talk or get to know anybody, read anything from St. Augustine to Pirandello, write any letters—no 'hush hush' except only when it related to what our Gurus had promulgated either as messages or in letters to their disciples. Reading between the lines of these, one might indeed infer that many among us grumbled and groaned if not growled when they did not have things their own way. I would even venture to submit that most of us felt like praying ardently: "My will be done, Guru—not thine"! But on the whole there was at least a spirit of co-operation and will to loyalty in all but a handful who adjudicated on the mistakes of the Gurus and evidently, itched to stand in their shoes. Even with these, however, Sri Aurobindo dealt with incredible leniency and the Mother never punished anybody for any delinquencies: she only withheld her smile when the delinquent transgressed certain extreme limits in his conduct. I shall never forget how she looked hard at me once—but I need not go into it since it is not important. Suffice it to say that thenceforward I took good care not to repeat a performance which might win me again that stony stare.

What was important was her unfailing smile as well as sleepless solicitude about our comforts. She was indeed an ideal human mother. I do not know to this day what is conveyed by the phrase 'Divine Mother'. I have been, I expect, somewhat too dense and incorrigible all along on

one point. I have wanted, first, to let my general conduct be ruled and wrong moods outruled by reason and secondly not to accept something as faith which looked suspiciously like superstition or fetish. I am still hazy about the import and the implication of many epithets in the Yogic terminology like superconscious, supernal, oversoul, overhead, etc., not to mention supramental. I suspect that there is a sturdy perverseness in me which declines to recognise itself as perverseness. Be the cause what it may, all I can state, sincerely and honestly, is that if I have loved the Mother or Gurudev, I have loved them, so far as I am conscious, *in the human way*; only I have striven, as best I could, to love them less and less selfishly. Gurudev and the Mother have strained hard to explain to me again and again the basic difference between the human and the divine way of reacting to things and I do not doubt that something did trickle down into me. (How wistfully I still repeat to myself, as on a rosary, that I understand more than I think I do!) But although I have never felt like questioning the right of the Mother and Gurudev to use such words, for the simple reason that I never doubted their exact knowledge, born of experience, of the things they spoke about, yet I cannot, to this day, bring myself to use such words without a strange feeling of guilt—as though I was simply mouthing *clichés*. This in itself would not perhaps be so culpable but my critical scepticism has by no means stopped there. For I have never yet been quite able to give others the same credit for sincerity as I claim for my own diffidence whenever I find them sky-rocketing confidently in purple words of the



type referred to. I may have used such words in my less guarded moments—one cannot always successfully watch over oneself however vigilant one may be—nor can I possibly claim for myself a consistency which I have found again and again, to my bitter cost, so difficult to achieve even in my normal day-to-day conduct. So I will only plead that even when I looked askance at some of my dear friends and colleagues, it was prompted less by malice than by sheer inability to sympathise with their temperament—and that also because I have seen the harm slogans do when one is not on one's guard: they lull one too often, alas, with the pathetic delusion that quoting wisdom is nearly as good as growing into it. (Sri Aurobindo wrote to me once: "Perhaps X had come to believe it himself—that he had become a superman—as George IV came to believe that he had won the battle of Waterloo by dint of repeatedly saying so".) But in return I will willingly wish them the joy of gloating over my deep discomfiture by furnishing them with evidence of Gurudev's disapproval of my admiration for the Russelian type of rationalism, as, for example, when he wrote to me soon after I came to the Ashram:<sup>1</sup>

"Dilip, I have not forgotten Russell, but I have neglected him first, for want of time; second, because for the moment I have mislaid your letter; third, because of lack of misunderstanding on my part. What is the meaning of his

<sup>1</sup> I invited his comment on Russell's remark in his 'Conquest of Happiness': "We are all prone to the malady of the introvert who, with the manifold spectacle of the world spread out before him, turns away and gazes upon the emptiness within."



'taking interest in external things for their own sakes?' And what is an 'introvert'? Both these problems baffle me.

"The word 'introvert' has come into existence only recently and sounds like a companion of 'pervert'. Literally it means one who is turned inwards. The Upanishad speaks of the doors of the senses that are turned outwards, absorbing man in external things ('for their own sakes', I suppose?) and of the rare man among a million who turns his vision inwards and sees the Self. Is that man an introvert? And is Russell's ideal man 'interested in externals for their own sakes'—a Ramaswami the chef, or Joseph, the chauffer, for instance—*homo externalis Russellius*, an extrovert? Or is an introvert one who has an inner life stronger than his external one—the poet, the musician, the artist? Was Beethoven in his deafness bringing out music from within an introvert? Or does it mean one who measures external things by an inner standard and is interested in them not 'for their own sakes' but for their value to the soul's self-development, its psychic, religious, ethical or other self-expression? Are Tolstoy and Gandhi examples of introverts? Or, in another field—Goethe? Or does it mean one who cares for external things only as they touch his own mind or else concern his ego? But that I suppose would include 999,999 men out of every million.

"What are external things? Russell is a mathematician. Are mathematical formulae external things, even though they exist here only in the World-mind and the mind of Man? If not, is Russell, as mathematician, an introvert? Again, Yajnavalkya says that one loves the wife not for the

sake of the wife, but for the Self's sake, and so with other objects of interest and desire—whether the self be the inner Self or the ego. In Yoga it is the valuing of external things in terms of the desires of the ego that is discouraged—their only value is their value in the manifestation of the Divine. Who desires external things 'for their own sakes' and not for some value to the conscious being? Even Cheloo, the day-labourer, is not interested in a four-anna piece for its own sake, but for some vital satisfaction it can bring him; even with the hoarding miser it is the same—it is his vital being's passion for possession that he satisfies, and that is something not external but internal, part of his inner make-up, the unseen personality that moves inside behind the veil of the body.

"What is then meant by Russell's 'for their own sakes'? If you enlighten me on these points, I may still make an effort to comment on his *mahavakya* (great dictum).

"More important is his wonderful phrase about the 'emptiness within'! On that at least I hope to make a comment one day or another."

The above letter meant much to me even though I could not accept to be so easily knocked out—in the very first round. I wrote back to him quoting from a book of Lytton Strachey about some idols in a potter's shop. "One fine morning," I wrote, "the potter discovered, to his utter amazement, that the lesser idols had all been hurled to the ground and blown to smithereens by the biggest which alone grandly survived. But in this case, Guru, you have not achieved nearly as complete a victory since one has at least

escaped annihilation: Bertrand Russell. And he still survives because unlike many far-famed Yogis he talks sense (and not childish rubbish) when adjudicating e.g. on the place of mind in life or of marriage in human relationship. Fortunately for us, Guru, you happen to be an exception among the Yogis but all the same let me humbly submit it as a possibility that maybe you can hold your own against men of Russell's calibre not so much because of your spiritual stature as because of your massive mind, intellectual clarity, and unimpeachable character. So I hope you will please allow me to doubt if you could have duelled thus with Russell in his own den and in the end bearded him had you been a spiritual giant but a mental dwarf. So I venture to suggest that you are doing a grave injustice to your own human equipment—your erudition, character, mental perspicacity etc. which have stood you here in good stead.” Also I made bold to point out to him how much he had in common with the great philosopher and thinker, his butt, quoting among other things from the latter's famous and inspiring ‘Free Man's Worship’: “To every man comes, sooner or later, the great renunciation...by death, by illness, by poverty, or by the voice of duty, we must learn, each of us, that the world was not made for us, and that, however beautiful may be the things we crave, Fate may nevertheless forbid them. It is part of courage, when misfortune comes, to bear without repining the ruin of our hope, to turn away our thoughts from vain regrets. This degree of submission to Power is not only just and right; it is the very gate of wisdom.”



And I went on to add:

"You must bear with me, Guru, if I quote something again from Russell—not for your benefit but mine: you see, I feel guilty, because I have not stressed so far as I should have, that there is a deeper side—of vision—to his nature. So I have translated into Bengali verse a fairly long passage from his 'Free Man's Worship' which will speak for itself".

Here is the passage:

"In the spectacle of Death, in the endurance of intolerable pain, and in the irrevocableness of a vanished past, there is a sacredness, an overpowering awe, a feeling of vastness, the depth, the inexhaustible mystery of existence, in which, as by some strange marriage of pain, the sufferer is bound to the world by bonds of sorrow. In these moments of insight, we lose all eagerness of temporary desire, all struggling and striving for petty ends, all care for little trivial things that, to a superficial view, make up the common life of day by day; we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose waves we toss for a brief hour. From the great night without, a chill blast breaks in upon our refuge; all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul which must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears. Victory, in this struggle with the powers of darkness, is the true baptism into the glorious company of heroes, the true initiation into the overmastering beauty of human existence."



He wrote back: "Your translation is admirable. I did not know that the mathematician was also a poet." Then he went on to add, possibly a trifle aroused:

"About Russell—I have never disputed his abilities or his character; I am concerned only with his opinions and there too only with those opinions which touch upon my province—that of spiritual Truth. In all religions, the most narrow and stupid even, and in all non-religions also, there are great minds, great men, fine characters. I know little about Russell, but I never dreamed of disputing the greatness of Lenin, for instance, merely because he was an atheist—nobody would, unless he were an imbecile. But the greatness of Lenin does not debar me from refusing assent to the credal dogmas of Bolshevism, and the beauty of character of an atheist does not prove that spirituality is a lie of the imagination and that there is no Divine. I might add that if you can find the utterances of famous Yogis childish when they talk of marriage or on other matters, I cannot be blamed for finding the ideas of Russell about spiritual experience, of which he knows nothing, very much wanting in light and substance. You have not named the Yogis in question and till you do, I am afraid I shall cherish a suspicion about either the height or the breadth of their spiritual experience. But of that hereafter, when I get a chance of an hour or two to write on it."

Later when I began to see various colours etc., he wrote to me in answer to my question whether it could be auto-suggestion or hallucination:

"No, it was neither optical illusion nor hallucination nor

coincidence (chromatic) nor auto-suggestion nor any of the other ponderous and vacant polysyllables by which physical science tries to explain away or rather avoid explaining the (scientifically) inexplicable. In these matters the scientist is always doing what he is always blaming the layman for, for when the latter lays down the law on things about which he is profoundly ignorant without investigation or experiment, without ascertained knowledge simply by evolving a theory or an *a priori* idea out of his own mind and plastering it as a label on the unexplained phenomena."

And then he went on to add, incidentally having a fling at the Russellian outlook:

"As for what showed itself to you, it was not a mere curious phenomenon, not even merely symbolic colour, but things that have a considerable importance....That this should be the first thing shown when the power of vision broke through its state of latency is very significant; it proves that you are in contact, the touch is already there in your inner being and that His force of presence and protection is already around you or over you as an envioning influence.

"Develop this power of that inner sense and all that it brings you. These first seeings are only an outer fringe—behind lie whole worlds of experience which fill what seems to the natural man the gap (your Russell's inner void) between the earth-consciousness and the Eternal and Infinite."

Lastly, he wrote in a post-script: "I remember when I first began to see inwardly (and outwardly also with the

open eye), a scientific friend of mine began to talk of after-images—‘these are only after-images!’ I asked whether after-images remained before the eye for two minutes at a time—he said, ‘no’, to his knowledge ‘only for a few seconds.’ I also asked him whether one could get after-images of things not around one or even existing upon earth since they had other shapes, another character, other hues, contours and a very different dynamism, life-movements and values—he could not reply in the affirmative. That is how these so-called scientific explanations break down as soon as you pull them out of their cloudland of mental theory and face them with the actual phenomena they pretend to decipher.”

In another letter he wrote commenting on an experience of mine: “I repeat what I have said before—though your physical mind does not yet believe—that these experiences show at once that your inner being is a Yogi capable of trance, ecstasy, intensest bhakti, fully aware of Yoga and Yogic consciousness and showing himself the very moment you get inside yourself even as the outer man is very much the other way round—modernised, externalised, vigorously outward-vital and knowing nothing of Yoga or the world of inner experiences. I could see at once when I saw you that there was this inner Yogi and your former experiences here were quite convincing to anyone who knows anything at all about these things. When there is this inner Yogi inside, the coming to the way of Yoga is sure and not even the most externalised surface consciousness—(not even a regular *homo Russellius* outside, and you are not that—only a little *Russellicatus* on the surface)—can prevent



final success in the Yoga. But the tussle between the inward and outward man can create a lot of trouble because the inward man pushes towards the Divine and will not let go and the outward man regrets, repines, pulls back, asks what is this shadowy thing to which he is being brought, this unknown, this (to him) far-off Ineffable. That, and not merely food or society, is the genesis of the struggle and trouble in you. And yet it is all a misunderstanding—for if the outer gave way entirely to the inner Yogi, he would find that what he lost or thought he was losing would be repaid a hundredfold—though he would get it in another spirit and consciousness, not any longer the transient and deceptive delight of the world for its own sake, but the delight of the Divine in the world a thousand times more intense, sweet and desirable.”

I quote the above to underline the difficulty he experienced to persuade us to open ourselves to his wisdom and, incidentally, to stress his inexhaustible patience in dealing with us. For instance he would, tirelessly, go on arguing with me again and again whenever I would lament that I did not find anything in myself which might justify his high hopes of me as a prospective Yogi. Nay, he would even come down to my level to convince my scepticism, and sometimes with the driest of intellectual arguments, to be able to outmanoeuvre me with my own weapons.

It was because he allowed us such liberties that we could go on treating him almost as our equal in stature—so much so that Nirod (who later became one of his personal attendants) often ran full tilt into him whenever his



daemon impelled him to. I will give here just one or two examples.

"O Guru", he once wrote in 1935, "I observe that whenever I communicate an experience to you, the next moment it stops. I hope the Guru is not responsible for this?"

"Well," Gurudev wrote back, "that is a thing we used often to note when the *sadhana* was in the early stages, namely, to speak of something experienced was to stop it. It is the reason why many Yogis make it a rule never to speak of their experiences. But latterly it had altogether ceased to be like that. So why are you starting that curious stunt all over again?"

But Nirod was nothing if not dauntless.

"I recall an incident of my childhood days", he wrote back. "I was dining with my father when I was called out. 'Papa', I said to him warningly, 'take care, you mustn't eat my fish.' Well, fathers may not, but Gurus?"

"No, Sir," Gurudev retorted, "I don't eat your fish. I have oceans of fish at my disposal and have no need to consume your little sprats. It is Messrs. Hostile Forces who do that—the *dasyus*, robbers."

In another letter Nirod flung a challenge: "Why not write something about this Supermind of yours which nobody understands or knows anything about? Surely it is not enough to claim that it is a different consciousness?"

Pat came the rejoinder the next morning: "What is the use? How much would anybody understand anyway?"

Besides, the present business is to bring down and establish the Supermind, not to explain it. If it establishes itself it will explain itself—if it does not, there is no use in explaining it. I have thrown hints about it in the past but without success in enlightening anybody. So why repeat the endeavour?"

He was always like that—had never any weakness for lording it over the weak whom he actually invited to "discuss things" familiarly with him. And he did it so unostentatiously that we often forgot how ill-equipped we were when we presumed to argue with him almost as though he encouraged us to believe that he had as much to learn from us, garrulous dwarfs, as we from him, the reticent giant! I well remember how I used to dash off just what came to me—on the most diverse topics imaginable—only to receive his comments the next morning, little realising that it cost him what he valued even more than his health and well-being, namely time, *his* time! But as it is little use being wise after the event I will give a few typical instances to bring into relief the greatness of his condescension against the background of our thoughtless levity.

No, I must use the *mot juste* for the word condescension will not do when what floats before my mind is his compassion, for nothing less could possibly make us stake our all for one who, to all outward seeming, lived remote—almost in a far cloudland of unreality so far as we were concerned—and yet could inspire us with a deep sense of progressive fulfilment. I recall an Urdu ghazal which I once translated and often sang to describe this:

Thou wok'st my heart to thy memory  
And mad'st the world parched...pale as sand:  
How shall I sing thy diamond gifts  
Or limn thy Bounty's wonderland?  
My prayer was given before I prayed:  
The jewels of thy skies were mine.  
The past became a scroll on waves  
Beneath thy newlit summit-sign,  
From me, who had no claim for meed,  
Never would thy Grace one boon withhold:  
Who but thy self could answer earth  
With squanderings of the heavenly gold?

To those who did not know him, all this may seem somewhat of an overstatement since it was not given to us to come in contact with him in a give-and-take of what we call friendship. But those who came to know him could only wonder how he moved people thus to their depths—he who (to exploit a Bengali idiom) was known as a “denizen of the deeps”; whom none had seen affected by even the most terrible of shocks, the fearless revolutionary who meditated calmly in a prison-cell when the hangman's rope was in the offing; who, a week before he passed away, had smiled affectionately when an attendant, a disciple wanted to call in a doctor.

“Where did you go, Nirod?” he asked when the other returned.

“To fetch the doctor,” he answered apologetically.

“Doctor? What for? Have you lost your head?”

Yes, such was he: moving through life even as a "squanderer of the heavenly gold," but never asking anything from anybody in any shape or form.

Once when an offer came from Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan that he would introduce him to the West if he wrote a philosophical article for the Westerners, he declined.

"Look here!" he wrote back to me. "Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Ashram correspondence and that is 'overwhelming' enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

"And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher—although I have written philosophy, which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry—I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher! How I managed to do it and why? First, because Paul Richard proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review—and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his head to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self! Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there, automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!



"I don't know how to excuse myself to Radhakrishnan—for I can't say all that to him. Perhaps you can find a formula for me? Perhaps: 'so occupied, not a moment for any other work, can't undertake because he might not be able to carry out his promise.' What do you say?"

I wrote what I could to Sir Sarvapalli but he importuned. So once again I wrote to Gurudev imploring him that he comply. In the end I even tried to coax him:

"Your name, Sir, is not yet known to the West and Radhakrishnan will give you wide publicity, fancy that! Besides, he is right and rational...etc."

But he was adamant.

"As to Radhakrishnan, I do not care whether he is right or wrong in his eagerness to get the contribution from me. But the first fact is that it is quite impossible for me to write philosophy to order. If something comes to me of itself, I can write, if I have time. But I have no time. I had some thought of writing to Adhar Das pointing out that he was mistaken in his criticism of my ideas about consciousness and intuition and developing briefly what were my real views about these things. But I have never been able to do it. I might as well think of putting the moon under my arm, Hanuman-like—although in his case it was the sun—and going for a walk. The moon is not available and the walk is not possible. It would be the same if I promised to Radhakrishnan—it would not be done, and that would be much worse than a refusal.

"And the second fact is that I do not care a button about

having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known as a 'leader'. Then again I don't believe in advertisement except for books, and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is poison. It means either a stunt or a boom, and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crests and leave it lifeless and broken, high and dry on the shores of nowhere—or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the 'religions' and is the reason of their failure. If I tolerated a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counter-weight in that amorphous chaos, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance. But the utility ends there and too much advertisement would defeat the object. I am perfectly 'rational', I assure you, in my methods and I do not proceed merely on my personal dislike of fame. If and in so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it; but I do not find publicity for its own sake desirable."

And yet he went on writing reams and reams of letters to such as we—for hours on end and for years and years!

Yes, to reason he was baffling, even though he claimed that he was "perfectly rational." But I find it difficult to take him at his word because I have not yet been able to find a clue to the mystery of his strange personality which not only drew us to him but made us cleave to his all but invisible self in spite of the hypnotic pull of multitudinous life outside. But to give a few more instances of how subtly he led us on to "discuss" things with him and in what a carefree way!

"O Guru," I wrote, "I enclose a fine poem of Nishikanta's entitled *The Yawning West*. Incidentally, I was telling him yesterday about Europe's frantic drive for the charnel-house in a fit of 'rationalised lunacy', as Russell puts it in his latest book, *In Praise of Idleness*. There he laments the imminent devastation of the coming War with the consequent holocaust of the finest ideals cherished by a handful of dreamers. Let me quote to you a few passages from his book which I wish my activist friend Subhash would ponder a little.

"After castigating 'compulsory military service, boy-scouts, the dissemination of political passion by the Press,' etc. Russell girds at the blind restlessness of pugnacious activism thus:

'We are all more aware of our fellow-citizens than we used to be, more anxious, if we are virtuous, to do them good, and in any case to make them do us good. We do not like to think of anyone lazily enjoying life, however refined



may be the quality of his enjoyment. We feel that everybody ought to be doing something to help on the great cause—whatever it may be—the more so as so many bad men are working against it and ought to be stopped. We have not the leisure of mind, therefore, to acquire any knowledge except such as will help us fight for whatever it may happen to be that we think important.’

“O Guru, what, I wonder, will be Subhash’s rejoinder to this sarcasm of Russell directed against his darling activism which, thanks to its blindness wedded to greedy self-aggrandisement, is today crushing out our delicate soul-aspirations towards all that is noble and beautiful in life?...”

“But Dilip,” he wrote back promptly, “you forget that Subhash is a politician and the rationality of politicians has, perforce, to move within limits: if they were to allow themselves to be as clear-minded as Russell, their occupation would be gone! It is not everybody who can be as cynical as a Birkenhead or as philosophical as a C. R. Das and go on with political reason or political make-believe in spite of knowing what it all came to, from *arrivisme* in the one and patriotism in the other case.”

“But no, Guru,” I protested, “I have not forgotten it any more than I have forgotten the blazing fact that any show of busy enthusiasm is applauded in this gullible age as the worthiest exploitation of our vitality which makes puppets of us all, mostly with the pathetic delusion that we are serving humanity! What I was driving at was Subhash’s penchant for activism for its own sake, to undertake a mountain of labour to produce a mouse, believing,



alas, (to quote your own remark on him) that 'by human intellect and energy making always a new rush, everything can be put right.' I wish my friend would try to develop a little more sober vision if only to be delivered from this sad delusion that by blind energy and rudimentary logic one could salve the shipwreck of civilisation. The stalwarts of the West have tried that game for centuries and the result has been—but why not hear Russell in his own words?—

'When the indemnities were imposed, the Allies regarded themselves as consumers; they considered that it would be pleasant to have the Germans work for them as temporary slaves, and to be able themselves to consume, without labour, what the Germans had produced. Then, after the treaty of Versailles had been concluded, they suddenly remembered that they were also producers, and the influx of German goods which they had been demanding would ruin their industries. They were so puzzled that they started scratching their heads, but that did no good, even when they all did it together and called it an International Conference. The plain fact is that the governing classes of the world are too ignorant and stupid to think through such a problem and too conceited to ask the advice of those who might help them'.

"O Guru, how I wish Subhash would not attach much value to Reason's inordinate pretensions which often make people as blind to stark reality such as this! *Qu'en dites-vous?*"

"You are right, Dilip," he wrote back. "Only you again seem to forget that human reason is a very convenient

and accommodating instrument and works only in circles set for it by interest, partiality and prejudice. The politicians reason wrongly or insincerely and have power to enforce the results of their reasoning so as to make a mess of the world's affairs: the intellectuals reason and show what their minds show them, which is far from being always the truth, for it is generally decided by intellectual preference and the mind's inborn or education-inculcated angle of vision,—but even if they see the Truth, they have no power to enforce it. So between blind power and seeing impotence the world moves, achieving destiny through mental muddle.”

I adduced, in reply, Russell's fling at national planning: “When a nation, instead of an individual, is seized by lunacy, it is thought to be displaying remarkable industrial wisdom!”

“*Seized by lunacy?*” he commented: “Well, this implies that the nation is ordinarily led by reason. But *is it?* Or even by common sense? Masses of men act upon their vital push, not according to reason: individuals too do the same. If they call in reason, it is as a lawyer to plead the vital's cause.”

I have quoted in full his letters on Russell for another reason which I may as well state here.

During the first few years of my Ashram life I simply did not know what to do with my Russellian scepticism in the face of Gurudev's deep disapproval of such an obstinate recalcitrance to spiritual experience. But this landed me in another dilemma: on the one hand I could not discard

Russell whose intellectual clarity and integrity of character I profoundly admired: on the other, even when I could not fully understand Gurudev's deeper wisdom and wider vision, I could not help but warm up to his exhortations. Unfortunately, however, the see-saw did not cease; for although there was not a vestige of doubt in my mind as to who should be followed, theoretically, it so happened that despite Gurudev's unanswerable arguments I found myself unable, in practice, to accept, once for all, that Russell had been discredited as a guide to wisdom in general. This dualism of mine in its turn, was sharply criticised by Krishnaprem to whom, alas, I turned, foolishly, for sympathy. For on this issue he evinced a heart of adamant and stormed at me from distant Almora:

"Why do you keep harping on Russell? I quite agree he is a fine man in many ways and a fine thinker of his own sort but why do you keep hoping that your Gurudev or someone else will answer his sceptical arguments? If you accept Russell's premisses you will be forced into his conclusions but then why accept his premisses? He is no muddle-headed thinker whose conclusions are at fault with his premisses. Quite the reverse. If you set foot on an escalator you will be automatically carried to the top of it; so why set foot on it at all when you see it going in the wrong direction?"

But there, precisely, lay the greatness of his character. He never minded if any of us wanted to experiment with an escalator "going in the wrong direction." For he had never believed in hard and fast taboos. (Years later, he told me once in conversation that the one thing he had never



cared to become was a dictator.) His tolerance and charity would have been incredible had it not been a fact of almost everyday experience. In the Ashram he tolerated quite a battalion of fire-eaters even when they were found out to be disloyal and treacherous. He gave a long rope even to some insolent rebels who, from calling him names and misrepresenting his catholic views, told deliberate lies—just to do him down. Even such calumniators and traitors he not only declined to expel from the Ashram but actually forgave again and again till I had to ask him which he loved more: to encourage the faithless or discourage the faithful?

As I look back in retrospect, somewhat sadly, I realise how often I myself have misunderstood him in the past. Perhaps I had to—his patience, charity and tolerance having been a little too incredible even for human credulity. For I did, often enough, feel impatient of his superhuman patience when some others took advantage of it without scruple. At such times I conveniently forgot how much I myself had profited by his patient acceptance of the burden of my obstinate ego and assertive self-importance. How often, indeed, had I rebelled, yet not once did he scold me—not even when I doubted his love and wisdom in my rebellious moods! Time and again, when I wrote to him that I had decided to throw up the sponge, he came to me with the balm of his affection, understanding and infinite tolerance not only forgiving the insolence of my repeated ultimatums but assuring me again and again:

“You need not imagine that we shall ever lose patience or give you up—that will never happen. Our patience,



you will find, is tireless because it is based upon unbounded sympathy and love. Human love may give up, but divine love is stable and does not falter. We know that the aspiration of your psychic being is sincere. It is because the sincere aspiration is there that we have no right to disbelieve in your *adhikara* for the Yoga.

"These difficulties do not last for ever—they exhaust themselves and disappear. But to reject them when they come is the quickest way to get rid of them for ever."

Nevertheless I could not, for the life of me, reject out of hand the hostile suggestions which got the better of me in my wrong moods. What was stranger still was that the more he leaned down to help me see the light of the Divine Will, the less I cared to forswear the darkness of my self-will, insomuch that I sometimes wondered—whether our graceless perversity did not wax in inverse proportion to the descent of the beneficent Grace offering to absolve our deep delinquencies. I wonder, however, whether the import of such paradoxes can ever be truly grasped by those who have never been all but swept off their feet by what Gurudev termed "the adverse forces". But his arguments and tender anxiety are likely to be appreciated by all who know anything about human solicitude. So, by way of illustration, I will refer here to two out of the numerous crises I had to undergo.

The first serious "attack", if I may so put it, developed in March, 1930. I had been feeling listless after the subsidence of the first flush of joy and optimism till, suddenly, I made a *faux pas* which brought matters rapidly to a head. I

felt—or rather imagined, to be more precise—that the Mother had grown indifferent to me. I told myself that what I had all along dreaded must have come to pass: that she had been disappointed in me and finally convinced that I would never make good. And it so happened that Gandhiji's famous Dandi march had just been announced in the papers: they would break the law by making salt and court prison. In my despair I wrote to Gurudev that I had decided to leave at once and go to prison, giving up such a futile undertaking as Yoga, the more as I could not bring myself to believe in his fantastic doctrine of the "hostile forces". I knew of course that it was nothing short of a mad impulse but I yielded to it nonetheless. I challenged him to prove his thesis and mocked at the idea of invisible phantom forces, such as he posited, swaying sensible (?) men like us. This time, I imagine, Gurudev wrote *without* a smile of irony.

"Dilip," he pleaded, "it is certainly the force hostile to Yoga and the divine realisation upon earth that is acting upon you at the present moment. It is the force (*one* force and not *many*) which is here in the Ashram and has been going about from one to another. With some as with B, V and P, it has succeeded; others have cast it away from them and have been able to liberate the light of their soul, open in that light to the nearness and the constant presence of the Mother, feel her working in them and move forward in a constant spiritual progress. Some are still struggling, but in spite of the bitterness of the struggle have been able to keep faithful to the divine call that brought them here.

"That it is the same hostile force would be shown, even if its presence were not for us visible and palpable, by the fact that the suggestions it makes to the minds of the victims are always the same. Its one master sign is always this impulse to get away from the Ashram, away from myself and the Mother, out of this atmosphere, and *at once*. For the force does not want to give time for reflection, for resistance, for the saving Power to be felt and act. Its other signs are doubt; *tamasic* depression; an exaggerated sense of impurity and unfitness; the idea that the Mother is remote, does not care for one, is not giving what she ought to give, is not divine, with other similar suggestions accompanied by an inability to feel her presence or her help; a feeling that the Yoga is not possible or is not going to be done in this life; the desire to go away and do something in the ordinary world—the thing suggested varying itself according to the personal mind. If it were not this one invariable hostile force acting, there would not be this exact similarity in all the cases. In each case it is the same obscurities thrown on the intelligence, the same subconscious movements of the vital brought to the surface, the same irrational impulses pushing to the same action: departure, renunciation of the soul-truth, refusal of the Divine Love and the Divine call.

"It is the vital crisis, the test, the ordeal for you as for others—a test and ordeal which we would willingly spare those who are with us but which they call on themselves by persistence in some wrong line of movement or some falsification of the inner attitude. If you reject entirely the falsehood that this force casts upon the *sadhaka*, if you



remain faithful to the Light that called you here, you conquer and, even if serious difficulties still remain, the final victory is sure and the divine triumph of the soul over Ignorance and the Darkness....

"I do not wish to disguise from you the difficulty of this great and tremendous change or the possibility that you may have a long and hard work before you; but are you really unwilling to face it and take your share in the great work? Will you reject the greatness of this endeavour to follow a mad, irrational impulse towards some more exciting work of the hour or the moment for which you have no true call in any part of your nature?

"There is no true reason for despondency; in nothing that has passed in you or which you have written do I find any good ground for it. The difficulties you experience are nothing to those that others have felt and yet conquered them, others who were not stronger than you....

"All that is needed is for your psychic being to come forward and open to the direct and real constant inner contact of myself and the Mother. Hitherto your soul expressed itself through the mind and its ideals and admirations through the vital and its higher joys and aspirations; but that is not sufficient to conquer the physical difficulty and enlighten and transform Matter. It is your soul in itself, your psychic being, that must come in front, awake entirely and make the fundamental change. The psychic being will not need the support of the intellectual ideas or outer signs and helps. It is that alone that can give you in the direct feeling of the Divine the constant nearness, the inner



support and aid. You will not then feel the Mother remote or have any further doubt about the realisation; for the mind thinks and the vital craves but the soul feels and knows the Divine."

I can still recapture the thrill the last sentence gave me and I came back to normal.

Then came another attack which was more serious—a couple of years later. The cause of it was of course my egoism and self-will, but in my ignorance, I put it down to Sri Aurobindo's apathy to our sufferings.

"Why must you insist on staying thus in deep purdah," I asked him rebelliously, "when we should be dying to hear just a word of reassurance direct from your lips? To succeed in any Yoga of Guruvada, the Guru must be loved, must he not? But how can one love a being who has become so remote as to taper off into all but a rumour? I have prayed to you in silence to grant me an interview; if you had really been omniscient as many here stoutly claim, you would have heard my anguished prayer since I came to you not because of any frustration (I threw away my career in the full flush of an assured success) but because of my need for the Divine. And yet you rest in repose, sequestered in your ivory-tower of God-knows-what consciousness and look calmly on while we sink in this relentless slough of despond!

"But although I am determined to end such a sterile relationship which can be of little use to you and a source of pointless suffering to me, I cannot bring myself to depart unless you consent to dismiss me with your blessings. For

strange as it may sound to you, I cannot do without your blessings even when I decline to go on with your impossible Yoga."

To that came a rejoinder which he alone could give in reply to such blatant impudence!—

"It is quite impossible for me to dismiss you or consent to your going away like this from us. If the idea of this kind of separation is possible to you, for us it is inconceivable that our close relation should end like this. I had thought that the love and affection the Mother and I bear you had been made evident by us. But if you say that you cannot accept it with the limitations on its outward manifestation that not our choice but inexorable necessity imposes on us for a time, I do not know how to convince you. I could not believe that you would find it in your heart to go or take such a step when it came to the point. As it is, I can only appeal to you not to allow yourself to be swept away by this attack, to remain faithful even in suffering to your soul that brought you here and to believe in our love that can never waver...."

I could not "disbelieve" in spite of my "determination" and wrote to him that I lacked the strength to wrench myself free from such a clasp. But then a contrary thing happened just when I was regaining my equilibrium, and I stumbled once again: I was told by a friend, who also happened to be in the grip of a similar depression, that both Mother and Sri Aurobindo had given almost identical assurances to more than one "previous failures". Instantly my heart misgave me once more and I wrote asking him whether he

could not possibly have made a mistake in choosing me—was he sure that I was not going to prove, like some of my predecessors, a spectacular failure? To that he simply replied: “You have to come and see the Mother at 9.30 and speak to her *heart to heart*. Both the Mother and myself have lavished much love and care on you. Do not believe all you hear. You do not belong to yourself: you belong to the Divine and to myself and the Mother. *I have cherished you like a friend and a son* and have poured on you my force to develop your powers—to make an equal development in the Yoga. We claim the right to keep you as our own here with us.”

And then the Mother wrote too: “It is quite certain that Sri Aurobindo cannot have made such a mistake. Since he says you are sure to succeed, it means that you shall succeed. Do not let troubles and difficulties depress you—the greater the difficulty the greater the victory hereafter.”

As I look back today, somewhat wistfully, to those days when I received such lovely letters fairly often, a very significant fact emerges of which I failed to take full cognisance at the time. It is that although they insisted on my receiving at their hands what they called their “divine love”, it was always their *human* way of offering it that prevailed in the end and made me comply with their invitation to attempt what seemed to me all but impossible: the radical change in human nature and its reactions. Otherwise I would have given up long ago. What I mean hereby is not easy to express, for often, when I try now to put in words what I felt then, I find that I tend to sound



dramatic if not theatrical. It may be that I *was* somewhat dramatic at the time, unconsciously. Nevertheless I can only vouch for what I believe to be true: that even when all such histrionic impulses are discounted, something very beautiful crystallised out of every such psychological crisis, something that I would like to call the human element which crept in often enough imperceptibly in his self-expression and, like a leaven, transformed my deepening psychic gloom into joy. I do not know if my emphasis is convincing even now, but the experience was vivid enough: that had they chosen to rule out the human way of arguing and persuading and coaxing the faithless recalcitrant in me, all their divine powers put together would not have sufficed to bring me out of the wood everytime, giving my dwindling hope a new lease of life as it were. Here my appraisalment may not be altogether right, but I cannot be far out either, since I still doubt whether they would have been able to liquidate the sturdy rebel in me repeatedly had they been too divine to be able to deal with the human in me in a human way. And since it was, almost always, their *human* way that told in the last resort—when the divine “thou-shalt-nots” had resigned—I decided that the Divine could not be nearly as irretrievably divine as the scared human in me pictured to himself, since He had evidently some use still for our own “poor” human ways of acting on humanity. Also, if such “ways” had really been branded as “inadmissible” in the divinised human, could they have persisted in surviving in the greatest of saints and seers who had transcended our human consciousness?



But then, I may be reminded appositely, have I forgotten what I wrote a little while ago: that I could never feel quite sure about distinguishing between the human and the divine movement of an impulse, say of love, or patience? I would then have to plead that what I meant was that here I could not lay my finger on any clear hair-line of demarcation between the two. For when I come to think back to those early years of my life in the Ashram, the memory of his inexhaustable tolerance returns upon me with a strange emphasis on something utterly beyond the reach of us, humans. I do not know how to explain this, but I cannot persuade myself that I feel this so powerfully now only because he is no more, or because I have allowed myself to be carried away by my sentimentality. In other words, I feel today, more strongly than ever, that somehow I have been enabled, suddenly, to read between the lines of so many of his letters which once I interpreted so differently. Thus what I said to him once in jest recurs to me today with a new ring of poignancy.

"You have told us, Guru," so I wrote, "that every *sadhaka* here represents a type and serves a Divine purpose in not only getting something from you but evoking something in you on the rebound. I have often wondered what purpose was served by *my* irruption here till the answer flashed, apocalyptically: I was sent here by the Divine to test your patience in a way none else possibly could: to bring out, that is, the difference between the human patience and the divine.

"But," I went on to add, "you have at least one advantage to which we, your assayers, cannot arrogate: your

divinity. No wonder you can be so patient with us since it is after all we who suffer, not you. That is why, I suppose, you look so sublime when we see your face, *au-dessus de la mêlée*, and therefore unperturbed, buttressed probably by the Supramental! Inevitably, equipped as you are with a temperament such as yours—so aloof from what Russell loves to call 'the hard world of fact'?"

To that he promptly replied:

"But what strange ideas again!—that I was born with a Supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities—from hardships, starvation in England and constant dangers and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties constantly cropping up here in Pondicherry, external and internal. *My life has been a battle; the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character.* But of course as we have not been shouting these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!"

"But is it altogether an illusion, Guru?" I pursued unconsoled. "You yourself have said in one of your famous messages which we, humans, have been exhorted to believe. It assures us: 'The Divine gives himself to those who give themselves without reserve in all their parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas

of *ananda*!' Now, I submit, if you wanted us to take all this not as mere rhetoric but as a concrete fact of indubitable experience, then it must follow (as the spring the winter, wouldn't it?) that none would be able to take seriously your trials and tribulations, far less presume to feel any commiseration for you. For how *could* one feel a pang for you when you yourself assure one of this inexhaustible captial to your everlasting credit waiting to indemnify you against any loss past, present or future? And then, since you are in constant communication with this obliging Divine of yours what have you really to long, suffer or sigh for? I have your letters telling me, first that, you had 'even initial realisations while pondering verses of the Upanishada or the Gita', and secondly that, 'in my case I walked into *nirvana* without intending it or rather *nirvana* walked casually into me not so far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave'. Good Lord! How can such a one possibly imagine the stuff we, humans, are made of? An *Avatar* like you or even a mighty *Vibhuti*<sup>1</sup> has only to apprise Him, your Omnipotent Commissariat, and He will give you with both (or shall I say, endless) hands all your need? For you and He being one, He cannot possibly refuse you what you ask any more than the hand can the mouth when the coveted food is handy."

His reply came: "Your descriptions of Avatars and prophets are magnificent in colour. I wish it were a sober fact that the Divine refuses us nothing—if He would start

<sup>1</sup> Vide Glossary



doing that, it would be glorious and I should not at all insist on constant beatitude. But from his representatives, Vibhutis, and Avatars, he exacts a good deal and expects them to overcome rather difficult conditions. No doubt they do not call for compassion, but, well, surely you can permit them an occasional divine right to a grumble?"

"Well Guru," I wrote back in a more conciliatory tone this time, "you can grumble on if it helps you overcome whatever difficulties confront you. But at all events do realise, for mercy's sake, that we cannot, even if we grumble away in full chorus and for all our worth, overcome such a difficulty as your smilelessness not to mention any others. And now on top of it all you foist this stupendous Divine of yours on the fragile altars of our hearts, an Idol whose weight makes even you grumble. What hope is there then for the likes of us?"

To that he replied: "The Divine may be difficult, but His difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at Him. Even my smilelessness was overcome, which Nevinson had remarked with horror more than twenty years before—'the most dangerous man in India', Aurobindo Ghosh 'who never smiles'. He ought to have added: 'but who always jokes'—but he did not know that as I was very solemn with him, or perhaps I had not evolved sufficiently on that side then. Anyhow since you have overcome that—my smilelessness—you are bound to overcome all the other difficulties also."

(Henri W. Nevinson, the well-known author, came to India in 1907 as a correspondent of the Manchester



Guardian and his book entitled *The New Spirit in India* published in 1908 made a deep impression not only on Indians but on the British bureaucracy as well, because he was not only gifted with vision but commanded a rare power of expression which could sway people. He sought out most men who were prominent in the then public life of our country and was most impressed by Sri Aurobindo's personality. Here is what he saw and felt in Sri Aurobindo even then:

"In an age of supernatural religion Aurobindo would have become what the irreligious mean by a fanatic. He was possessed by that concentrated vision, the limited and absorbing devotion. Like a horse in blinkers he ran straight, regardless of everything except the narrow bit of road in front. But at the end of that road he saw a vision more inspiring and spiritual than any fanatic saw who rushed on death with Paradise in sight. Nationalism to him was surrounded by a mist of glory, the halo that medieval saints beheld gleaming around the head of martyrs. Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dreams, indifferent to the means. 'Nationalism', he said in a brief address delivered in Bombay, early in 1908, 'is a religion that comes from God'.)

Sometimes, we felt in our remorse, we had gone too far, as here, for instance. His coming down to spar with such as we might redound to his glory, but what about the foil of our levity? I wrote to him once in such a penitent mood

about a famous canon who had said to his brother: "Brother, you and I are exceptions to the laws of Nature. You have risen by your gravity and I have sunk by my levity."

"I hope, Guru", I wrote in conclusion, "that my epistolary frivolity will not disqualify me altogether as ineligible if and when you apply for a passport for me to the conscientious Sentinel of the Kingdom of Heaven?" To that he wrote back: "Your 'epistolary frivolity' was all right. There is laughter in the Kingdom of Heaven though there may be no marriage there."

And he could give his absolving "laughter" because he could understand, just as he could understand because he could love, which had made him write to me a few months earlier:

"It is only the divine love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of darkness towards the Divine. The Galileo-like *Je-m'en-fiche-ism*<sup>1</sup> would not carry me one step: it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping towards the goal."

But strange as it may sound to many who are willing to take him as an embodiment of the Divine, that is, something beyond the ambit of human comprehension, the very assumption that he was divine, even when we could not define 'divinity' (except in that we could not claim him as one of us) made us fret and fume to the top of our bent.

<sup>1</sup> I do not care

And from his watch-tower of summit-vision he must have seen that clearly for has he not written apropos that mortality finds the unmitigated Divine so hard to bear that it is actually impelled to reject its boons of immortality?—

“Earth’s grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears  
Rejected the undying rapture’s boon—”

which he probably regarded as one of the salient symptoms of earth’s resistance to any divine descent, or rather mortality’s innate antipathy to Immortality as a result of which

“It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness....  
Inflicting on the heights the abysm’s law  
It sullies with its mire heaven’s messengers  
And meets the sons of God with death and pain.”

And it was not a mere regret he had vented but a deep tragedy for these “sons of God” that it had to be, down the ages,

“The cross their payment for the crown they gave.”

In the Ashram most of us gave ample proof of being to some extent responsible for this grievous state of things in so much that it weighed on our minds all the time and yet we saw no way out, naturally, being not only sceptical about the possibility of the divinisation of the human elements in us, but actually opposed to it in practice, if

not in theory, a fact which probably made him sigh in *Savitri*, (Book VI, Canto II):

“A dark concealed hostility is lodged  
In the human depths, in the hidden heart of Time  
That claims the right to change and mar God’s work.  
This all must conquer who would bring down God’s  
peace.

This hidden foe lodged in the human breast  
Man must overcome or miss his higher fate.  
This is the inner war without escape.  
Hard is the world-redeemer’s heavy task;  
The world itself becomes his adversary,  
His enemies are the beings he came to save.  
The world is in love with its own ignorance.”

Yes, he had indeed his work cut out and he knew it. Years ago he wrote to me that he had been “dredging, dredging, dredging, the mire of the subconscious”, and he hinted at the same resistance in a letter to Nirod: “It (the Supramental Light) was coming down before November, 1934, but afterwards all the mud arose and it stopped. But there are red crimson lights. One is Supramental Divine Love, the other Supramental Physical Force.” Somewhat at sea, I asked him what was his drift. He sent me only four lines of an unpublished poem by way of explanation which I quoted subsequently in my *Among the Great*:



He who would bring the heavens here  
Must descend himself into clay  
And the burden of earthly nature bear  
And tread the dolorous way.<sup>1</sup>

But to revert to the human. For I do not want to convey the impression that although we were often enough conscious of our deep limitations we were always unhappy on that account or that Gurudev and the Mother wanted us to go on our way brooding profitlessly about our shortcomings and lapses. Did he not once write to me semi-humorously that he had all along wanted to follow the easier—that is, the sunlit path because he himself was “constitutionally lazy”—which made him, unheroically “prefer the easiest and the most automatic method possible!” I doubted whether this could really be “easy” for aspirants such as we! Anyhow I persevered in reminding him of his dark hints in the past that his Integral Yoga bristled with difficulties. Had he not also written in an oft-quoted letter of his: “I call no one in the world, nor am I here to convert anybody” etc.? In the end I wrote: “Such being your published views, why do you object to the path of *vairagya* which I propose to take especially when I feel deeply discouraged by all sorts of adverse suggestions?”

To this he replied, once again, with his characteristic understanding and solicitude:

“It is evident that something in you, continuing the

<sup>1</sup> Published subsequently in his poem “A God’s Labour”

unfinished curve of a past life, is pushing you on the path of *vairagya*—in spite of our preference for a less painful one—something that is determined to be drastic with the outer nature so as to make itself free to fulfil its secret aspiration. But do not listen to these suggestions of the voice that says: 'You shall not succeed and it is no use trying'. That is a thing that need never be said in the Way of the Spirit, however difficult it may seem at the moment to be. Keep through all the aspiration which you express so beautifully in your poems; for it is certainly there and comes out from the depths, and if it is the cause of suffering—as great aspirations are, in the world and nature where there is so much to oppose them—it is also the promise and surety of emergence and victory in the future”.

To which I replied that it was because I was born a sceptic that I wondered whether there really was an easier way, “the sunlit path”, in this world of dominant shadows.

He answered in the affirmative and wrote:

“The sunlit path can only be followed if the psychic is constantly or usually in front or if one has a natural spirit of faith and surrender or a face habitually turned towards the sun or psychic predisposition (e.g. faith in one's destiny) or acquired the psychic turn. That does not mean that the ‘sunlit man’ has no difficulties; he may have many, but he regards them cheerfully as ‘all in the day's work’; but if he gets a bad beating, he is capable of saying: ‘Well, that was a queer go, but the Divine is evidently in a queer mood and if that is his way of doing things, it must be the

right one; I am surely a queerer fellow myself and that, I suppose, was the only means of putting me right'. But everybody can't be of that turn, and surrender which would put everything right is, as you say, difficult to achieve completely. That is why we do not insist on total surrender at once, but are satisfied with a little to begin with, the rest is to grow as it can."

But do what we would, we simply could not keep our faces "turned towards the sun", feeling sometimes too deeply discouraged by the darkness that deepened before us as we trudged on. But although it was true that the more we tried to follow the easier sunlit path, the more we found it difficult to cleave to the right attitude, yet it would be untrue to say that the struggle brought us nothing but pain: it taught us invaluable lessons; unmasked little by little the subtlest tricks of the ego; gave us joy whenever we fought its suggestions down and often enough got our self-will to bow progressively to the Guru's will or our pride to chase the false preconceived notions so that the true notions might have some niches to settle in like white doves of purity. There was also the joy of receiving Gurudev's letters, making a joint effort to obey him and the Mother and last, though by no means the least, basking in the beneficent rays of her approving eyes. And then, as days passed, we grew more and more conscious of the supreme importance of her gracious self, the self of sweetness, beauty and unfailing compassion. Also the more we came to appreciate this, the more our hearts went out to her till in intermittent, if somewhat rare, moments of bliss

we simply walked on air, when our hearts sang gratefully to her:

In lotus-groves Thy spirit roves:  
    where shall I find a seat for Thee?  
To Thy feet's tread—feet dawn-rose red—  
    opening my heart Thy throne shall be.  
    All things unholy hurt thy soul:  
    I would become a stainless whole  
O World's delight! All-beauty's might!  
    unmoving house Thy Grace in me.  
    An arid heart Thou canst not bear:  
    It is Thy will love's bonds to wear:  
Then by Thy sweetness' magic completeness  
    make me Thy love's eternal sea.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, but may I still defend myself, or rather plead a little for the unregenerate human in each of us?

It would be true to say that something in her did sometimes impel even rationalist sceptics like myself to write ecstatic poems of her heart-warming grace, but it would be equally true to say that the same "something" sometimes induced just the opposite moods of denial and revolt which urged us strongly to depart in hot haste and depart for ever. At such crises, and here is my point, it was only her reassuring human ways which could win us back to allegiance.

<sup>1</sup> A translation by Sri Aurobindo of a Bengali song written by Anilbaran, one of his disciples.



That is why I have often felt—I say this somewhat diffidently though—that in certain moments we do feel inexplicably moved by the utter “humanness” of the remote Divine, possibly because we have not yet learned how to feel truly at home in the unqualified divinity of the Divine—at any rate, not in the way we can in His declared humanity. I take it that this was what Gurudev meant when he wrote about the disguised World-Mother manifesting in the human frame of Savitri accepting humanity’s “sorrow, struggle, fall” because she wanted (Book I, Canto I):

To live with grief, to confront death on her road...  
The mortal’s lot became the Immortal’s share...  
Accepting life’s obscure terrestrial robe,  
Hiding herself even from those she loved,  
The Godhead greater by a human fate.

To give one instance, even at the risk of ending this chapter perhaps on a note of anticlimax:

The day I arrived in Pondicherry I was in a mood of indescribable exaltation: had I not burnt my boats, ready for anything, out to brave no matter what, eager to suffer privations, welcoming even the total dearth of creature comforts? I had only one blanket for my bedding and not even a pillow: in my then heroic mood I had got used to sleeping without one.

I had just spread my one and only rug on the floor of my room when a *sadhaka* came in and without a word fixed a pulley on the ceiling and then passed a wire over, to be

attached to a bulb he held in his hand.

In my curiosity, I asked him what it was all about. "Mother has asked me to fix a movable bulb"; he answered, and went on: "She said: 'Dilip is fond of reading and will probably find such an arrangement convenient'."

I was strangely moved. I had just landed in an Ashram I hardly knew anything about and I knew about her even less. But here she was not only thinking of me in the midst of her multifarious responsibilities, but actually and actively ministering to my needs just like a *human* mother, solicitous even about my creature comforts, when I had come in such a heroic mood ready for any tussle with the grim Lord of my destiny!

In my heedlessness I may forget many an apocalypse of the divine glory in her, but the memory of this utterly human mother in her will remain undimmed.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ASHRAM: SOME DISCIPLES

I HAVE decided, not without hesitation, to write now about a few of the disciples I came to know in the Ashram who made on me an impression for a twofold reason: first because of their native aptitudes and secondly because of the characteristic manner in which each of them reacted to Gurudev's personality and guidance. I have undertaken to attempt this in order to correct a wrong stress I may have unwittingly given while paying my homage to one who has been the most unforgettable character that I ever came to know in my life. This I say apart from the deep debt I shall always owe him as much for having been what he was as for having come down in his compassion to one who was so utterly incapable of making any adequate return for what he received from such a donor for more than two decades. By 'wrong stress' I imply the overemphasis I may have put on my own angle of vision because, when all is said, to each spectator his own vision must, inescapably, seem more important if not more trustworthy and real than that of all the rest put together. Do what one will, a man cannot break the shell of his ego which separates him from other egos. But even then surely he can, if he honestly tries, amend partly "the observer's error"—if I may borrow a scientific

phrase—by comparing his own appraisal with that of some others.

To make my meaning clear I will begin straightway with an instance in point.

There was a young lady whom I met in the Ashram in 1928 who interested me because I was told that she had had some remarkable occult experiences. I must conceal her identity for reasons which I need not disclose. She came one day straight to my room and talked about music of which she knew something. Then she told me that she had had a previous guide if not Guru whose contact had given her the first push over the edge which made her topple subsequently into the delightful "abyss" of Sri Aurobindo's integral Yoga, as she put it smilingly.

I pricked up my ears at once. This was just what I had been aching for! "God is!"—I said to myself.

"And then?" I asked eagerly.

"What then?" she laughed. "I came here. But I was puzzled when Mother first told me to open myself. But how was I to *open* myself?"—and so on.

But she did open: wasn't she an adept? How I admired her! And the result was that one day, while meditating, she saw a strange vision, namely that she was wholly separate from her body, roaming about in space, a witness to distant happenings. (This identical experience was related to me once more by an old *sadhaka* a few years later.) And she was staggered!

I was thrilled. For this was *the* experience I had heard so much about of the inner consciousness showing itself



distinct and separate from the physical. An experience worth having in these days when consciousness is so triumphantly dismissed by scientific materialism as a function of the body, because this tends to establish that one *can* see without the eyes and know of things happening beyond one's horizon, things that could, besides, be verified, as was done by her many times.

Yea, I was deeply impressed!

But alas, she left a few years later. I must be cautious and say no more, only hint that she had to go because she could not (or would not, shall I say?) change beyond a point.

I learnt, incidentally, that it was not enough to have such "experiences", however startling. One must aspire only for the most startling of all experiences: the change of nature without which no abiding change of consciousness could be achieved.

But, unhappily for me, she induced in me an expectation that gave me no end of trouble. For I started meditating for hours but, alas, not even the shadow of such an experience so much peeped on the threshold of my expectancy! And I was told by others that this was because I failed to "open myself", which decided many who said that I might be a good poet and musician but not a good Yogi. So I wrote to Sri Aurobindo in despair that I could not have any experiences because I could not "open" the closed doors of my inner being, as so many pointed out. I also wrote to him what someone else had told me—about there being a division in me—that is why I was where I was (whatever it might mean). I myself took it to mean that there was a self-

contradiction in me which must have been the cause of the obstinate lack of response on the part of the Divine. In the end I wrote, crestfallen, that probably this self-contradiction or division was an index to my insincerity and the lack of response the inescapable retribution.

To which he wrote back with his unfailing kindness and patience:

"The peculiarity you note—of self-contradiction in yourself—is universal: it is one part of the being which believes and speaks the right and beautiful things: it is another which doubts and says the opposite. I get communications for instance from X in which for several pages he writes wise and perfect things about the *sadhana*; then, suddenly without transition, he drops into his physical mind and peevishly and complainingly says, well, things ignorant and incompatible with all that wisdom. X is not insincere when he does that—he is simply giving voice to two parts of his nature. Nobody can understand himself or human nature if he does not perceive the multi-personality of the human being. To get all parts into harmony, that is the difficult thing.

"As for the lack of response, well, can't you see that you are in the ancient tradition? Read the lives of the saints—you will find them all (perhaps not all, but at least so many) shouting like you that there was no response and getting into frightful tumults and agonies and desperations until the response came. Many people here who can't say that they haven't had experiences do just the same—so it does not depend on experiences. I don't advise the procedure

to anybody, mind you. I only say that the feeling of your never having had a very concrete response does not mean that you will never have it and that fits of despair at having arrived nowhere do not mean that one will never arrive..."

I come now to a dear friend of mine about whom it is a joy to write. I warn the reader, however, that I lay no claim to be above bias. A saying of the great Goethe always raised an echo in my mind: "*Aufrichtig zu sein kann ich versprechen, unparteiisch zu sein, aber nicht.*"<sup>1</sup> I do not mean that I like, *consciously*, to say things in a friend's favour which my sober judgment is reluctant to sanction. But I do mean that when one is very fond of a person one becomes, willy-nilly, a little more vividly responsive to his qualities than can be fully approved by those who are uninfluenced by such a predilection. Naturally, one could here too—as in everything else—go on arguing the pros and cons till doomsday: whether sympathy is more likely to be nearer the truth than a cold critical appraisalment. I feel no urge to swell the inconclusive babel of such a debate. So I will only repeat what Tagore told me once sighing, with a picturesque charm all his own (which I lack): "I really long to praise, Dilip! Sometimes it even grows on me like hunger or thirst. But I can't, alas! Many there are of whom I feel like speaking appreciatively. But as I rush on, my critical intellect protests aghast and then I have to weigh my words. The result—a sorry tribute which often does more harm than good—to obviate which

<sup>1</sup> I can promise to be sincere but not impartial.



I have to keep silent rather than dole out an inadequate measure and feel like a niggard." May this apology suffice. Amen!

The friend who impressed me so deeply in the early years of my Ashram life was K. D. Sethna who has since become famous both as a poet and a priest of high—or shall I say, spiritual—journalism. I can clearly recapture with my mind's eye his delicate sensitive face which first attracted me with its fine crop of Christ-like whiskers which he discarded subsequently, to the universal regret of his friends and admirers. For we did admire it without pressing the 'resemblance' any further. And let me add, with a sigh, that those who have never seen him with his whiskers will never be able to appreciate our sigh over its merciless eradication. And then his eyes: how they radiated a keen though not unkind glint of intelligence! For he was nothing if not sympathetic and enthusiastic. Fortunately, he knew where to draw the line when expressing his sympathy in favour of this or that person.

Which brings me to his alert common sense. I have been told that Sri Aurobindo once said, in joke, that the Divine wanted the aspirants to surrender many things which they guarded jealously but one thing they did surrender with alacrity which was not exacted: common sense. Sethna was not one of these. For his common sense was never an absentee in his talks and adjudications which seemed remarkable to me as he talked and passed verdicts readily enough. I remember once (years later, when he had matured further) how he debated with Krishnaprem



in my living-room. How I envied his dialectical intelligence! And Krishnaprem not only admired his mental robustness in a frail physique but enjoyed to the full breaking a lance with him. But he had to go all out to hold his own against Sethna, which is saying much. Yes, Sethna was nothing if not perspicacious and wide-awake on top of being sensible. It was refreshing to talk with him and stimulating to differ from him, since even when one differed from his point of view one did feel that one was *made* to look at things from a new angle as it were. In a word, his talks were always suggestive. But to come now to something more important.

One meets clever people often, and highly intelligent people, too, now and then. But seldom does one meet an intelligence which aspires to be replenished at the fount of a deeper wisdom. Intelligence in itself is indeed admirable and none but a fool will deny its unquestionable utility. But what is not as often suspected, far less admitted, is that intelligence is a mediator not a creator. It can help in giving expression to something that it receives from somewhere to which it seldom wins a clue, but it cannot *invoke* that something—call it aspiration, knowledge, love and what not.

I am afraid many (especially "the intellectuals") will take umbrage at this—what they will call—disparagement of the intellect. But alas, one cannot both eat one's cake and have it: one cannot glimpse something higher than what the mind can reveal and yet retain unimpaired one's faith in the mental. That is why most intelligent people fight shy

of mystic wisdom. They are not wrong in dreading this, for the savour of the higher joys is not merely creative, but destructive also, being by its very nature subversive of the *status quo*.

Those who are not born with an exceptional intelligence are somewhat fortunate as they have no axe to grind in favour of the *status quo* established and jealously guarded by the intellect. But those who have once tasted of intellectual joys find it not a little hard to relinquish what they have grown to love. That is why I admired Sethna more than I admired many another who claimed being advanced *sadhakas*, to the deep chagrin of Sri Aurobindo. For when somebody once claimed that he was an advanced *sadhaka* and men like Sethna were mere poets he wrote: "Why X's claim to be an advanced *sadhaka* and what is the sense of it? It resolves itself into an egoistic assertion of superiority over others which is not justified so long as there is egoism and the need of assertion, accompanied as it always is by a weakness and a turbid imperfection which belie the claim of having a superior consciousness to the *inadvanced sadhaka*. It is time these crudities disappeared from the Ashram atmosphere."

This is not irrelevant. For Sethna impressed me the more because he not only never made such a claim to having reached "a superior consciousness" but also he had the uncommon wisdom of common sense to see that one should accept what the Guru said even if it seemed—as it often enough must, intellectual egoism being what it is—unacceptable to one's mental preconceptions. That

is why he often helped me by bowing to Sri Aurobindo's verdicts even though he too, like me, wanted first to understand with the mind as far as one could achieve it.

Luckily for him, he had an advantage over many another who came to the Ashram with deep religious *samskaras* (formulations) and could thus pour his heart's worship, unstintedly, at the altar of the Master. This I say with full knowledge of its implications. For I myself dared not compare Sri Aurobindo with some of his predecessors whom I need not name. But Sethna could—and with an honest conviction. It was this honesty married to an intelligence which drew me to him more and more for I have been sometimes roused to oppose some *sadhakas* who talked with disrespect about past prophets and seers. I myself did not feel any call to compare, because I could not at the time feel quite the same degree of enthusiasm about Sri Aurobindo as Sethna did. Here I have to admit that he scored over me in his *gurubhakti*. But what I found personally rather charming of him was that he never flaunted the initial advantage he had in coming to Sri Aurobindo with a clean heart-tablet on which no other holy figure had been etched. This was assuredly one of the reasons why he received so much from Gurudev, especially in insight into mystic poetry. I do not know personally of any living critic who has read Sri Aurobindo's poetry so thoroughly and acquired such a deep grasp of both its poetical beauty and technical mastery, insomuch that he may easily be adjudged a specialist in these two capacities. (I say 'living critic' because Chadwick has, alas, departed this life—



about whose outstanding poetical gift and *sadhana* I will have a good deal to say presently.)

Naturally I liked Sethna also because he was, like Chadwick and myself, a poet who continued all along to be a recipient of Sri Aurobindo's letters on poetry. I was fond of his poems too but as my knowledge of English verse was rather poor at the time, I could not sufficiently appreciate his technique. Still I loved some of his poems even in those days—nearly twenty years ago—and translated them, which knit us together into a closer bond. One such poem which was singled out for special praise by Gurudev was entitled *This Errant Life* which I must quote in full if only to bring out the side of aspiration to his nature:

This errant life is dear although it dies;  
And human lips are sweet though they but sing  
Of stars estranged from us; and youth's emprise  
Is wondrous yet, although an unsure thing.

Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!  
I fear to soar lest tender bonds decrease.  
If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow  
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,  
Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,  
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.  
For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:  
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,  
And all Thy formless glory turn to love  
And mould Thy love into a human face!



When I sent Gurudev my Bengali translation he wrote, commenting:

"Amal's<sup>1</sup> lines are not easily translatable, least of all into Bengali. There is in them a union or rather fusion of high severity of speech with exaltation and both with a pervading intense sweetness which it is almost impossible to transfer bodily without loss into another language. There is no word in excess, none that could have been added or changed without spoiling the expression, every word just the right revelatory one—no colour, no ornamentation, but a sort of suppressed burning glow, no similes, but images which have been fused inseparably into the substance of the thought and feeling—the thought perfectly developed, not idea added to idea at the will of the fancy, but perfectly interrelated and linked together like the limbs of an organic body. It is high poetic style in its full perfection and nothing of all that is transferable. You have taken his last line and put in a lotus-face and made divine love bloom in it,—a pretty image, but how far from the glowing impassioned severity of phrase: 'And mould thy love into a human face!'"

I shall pass by the constant and ready help plus encouragement which Sethna has given me all along in my poetic aspirations in English as that will be going beyond the immediate and urgent aim of this humble homage to

<sup>1</sup> Sethna was given by Gurudev the name of "Amal Kiran" which means "The Clear Ray". I have reverted to his original name as he is better known outside as K. D. Sethna.

one under whose aegis we in our little colony endeavoured to follow, as best we could, the ideal that has drawn us together. I will refrain, for the same reason, from enumerating his other rare qualities such as his sheer love of poetry or innate generosity which prompted him to praise many a budding Ashram poet. But I might as well write here of my fruitful contact with the great poet A.E. for which Sethna was partly responsible. It happened like this.

Sethna, and later Chadwick, used to give me valuable subsidiary advice about English prosody and verse-making which I was learning under the direct guidance of Sri Aurobindo. I will have more to write, in a subsequent chapter on our Master's corrections and counsels and so will confine myself here to Sethna who became the leader of our little *cénacle* almost as naturally as a courageous man becomes the leader of a party of timid pilgrims. One day without telling him, I sent A.E. a few of his poems along with some extracts from Sri Aurobindo's *Future Poetry* which moved us to a deep admiration, extracts such as (I quote these from a then diary of mine):

"All art worth the name must go beyond the visible, must reveal, must show us something that is hidden."

"So poetry arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries."

"Poetical speech is the spiritual excitement of a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery among the magic islands of form and name in these inner and outer worlds."

"The aim of poetry, as of all true art, is neither a photographic or otherwise realistic imitation of Nature, nor

a romantic furbishing and painting or idealistic improvement of her image, but an interpretation by the images she herself affords us not on one, but on many planes of her creation, of that which she conceals from us, but is ready, when rightly approached, to reveal." And so on.

Also I asked A.E.'s permission to publish my translations of some of his lovely poems like *Warning*, *Krishna* etc.

I enclosed also a poem on silence written by a friend, a poem which I could not sincerely sympathise with; I wrote that I held all wordy eloquence about silence somewhat suspect.

He sent me his kind reply written in his own hand (that is, not a typed letter) in which he signed himself A.E. (his pen-name) and not George Russell.

The letter was from Dublin and was dated January 6, 1932:

"Dear Dilip Roy,

"Your letter has come at a time when I am too troubled in mind to write, as I would like, about the poems you sent me. Yes, you have my permission to translate the verses or any other poems you may desire.

"I think the extracts from Sri Aurobindo very fine, and the verses you sent of Mr. Sethna have a genuine poetic quality. There are many fine lines like

'The song-impetuous mind.'

'The Eternal Glory is a wanderer  
Hungry for lips of clay.'

"Many such lines show a feeling for rhythm which is remarkable since the poet is not writing in his native but



a learned language. I refer to this because the only advice one writer can give another rightly is technical criticism. The craft of any art, painting, music, poetry, sculpture, is continually growing and much can be taught in the schools. But the inspiration cannot be passed on from one to another. So I confine myself to a technical criticism.

"You, like many Indians, are so familiar with your great traditions that it is natural for you to deal with ideas verging on the spiritual more than European writers do. The danger of this when writing poetry is that there is a tendency to use or rather overuse great words like 'immensity', 'omnipotence', 'inexhaustible', 'limitless' etc. By the very nature of the ideas which inspire you, you are led to use words of that nature because of a kinship with the infinity of the spirit. But in the art of verse if one uses these words overmuch they tend to lose their power just as painting in which only the primary colours would weary the eye.

"I would ask Mr. Sethna to try to reserve the use of such great words, as a painter keeps his high lights, for the sun and moon or radiant water and the rest of his canvas is in low tones. So the light appears radiant by contrast. English is a great language but it has very few words relating to spiritual ideas. For example the word *Karma* in Sanskrit embodies a philosophy. There is no word in English embodying the same idea. There are many words in Sanskrit charged with meanings which have no counterpart in English: *Dhyani*, *Sushupti*, *Turiya*, etc., and I am sure the languages which the Hindus speak today must be richer in words fitted for spiritual expression than English,



in which there are few luminous words that can be used when there is a spiritual emotion to be expressed. I found this difficulty myself of finding a vocabulary though English is the language I heard from my cradle.

"I hope Mr. Sethna will forgive my saying all this. I do so because I find a talent in the verses you sent me and do not wish him to do without such burnishing as a fellow-craftsman can help to give.

"Will you tell your philosophic friend who praises silence that with the poet the silence cannot be for ever? He sings and then keeps silent until the cup is filled up again by sacrifice and meditation and then he must give away what he gets, or nothing more will be poured into his cup. The secret of this is that through the free giver the song flows freely and whoever constrains life in himself, in him it is constrained. There is indeed the Divine silence, but we do not come to that being by negation."

Sethna submitted his comments on this letter to Gurudev who wrote back:

"If you send your poems to five different poets, you are likely to get five absolutely disparate and discordant estimates of them. A poet likes only the poetry that appeals to his own temperament or taste, the rest he condemns or ignores. (My own case is different because I have made in criticism a practice of appreciating everything that can be appreciated as a catholic critic would.) Contemporary poetry, besides, seldom gets its right judgement from contemporary critics even.

"Nothing can be more futile than for a poet to write

in expectation of contemporary fame or praise, however agreeable that may be, if it comes; but it is not of much value; for very poor poets have enjoyed a great contemporary fame and very great poets have been neglected in their time. A poet has to go on his way, trying to gather hints from what people say for or against, when their criticisms are things he can profit by, but not otherwise moved if he can manage it—seeking mainly to sharpen his own sense of self-criticism by the help of others. Difference of estimate need not surprise him at all."

Sethna asked him next a pointed question (which will be readily inferred from his reply) to which the answer came again:

"Your letter suggested a more critical attitude on A.E.'s part than his actual appreciation warrants. His appreciation is, on the contrary, sufficiently warm: 'a genuine poetic quality' and 'many fine lines'—he could not be expected to say more. The two quotations he makes certainly deserve the praise he gives them and they are moreover of the kind, which A.E. (and Yeats also) would naturally like. But your poem, *This Errant Life*, selected for special praise, has no striking expression, like these standing out from the rest, just as in a Greek statue there would be no single feature standing out in a special beauty (eyes, lips, head or hands) but the whole has a harmoniously modelled grace of equal perfection everywhere as, let us say, in the perfect charm of a statue by Praxiteles. This—apart from the idea and feeling which goes psychically and emotionally much deeper than the idea in the lines quoted by A.E.

which are poetically striking but have not the same subtle spiritual appeal; they touch the mind and vital strongly but the other goes home into the soul....

"His remarks about 'immensity' etc. are very interesting to me; for these are the very words, with others like them, that are constantly recurring at short intervals in my poetry when I express not spiritual thought, but spiritual experience. I knew perfectly well that this recurrence would be objected to as bad technique or an inadmissible technique; but this seems to me a reasoning from the conventions of a past order which cannot apply to a new poetry dealing with spiritual things. A new art of words written from a new consciousness demands a new technique. A.E. himself admits that this rule makes a great difficulty because these 'high light' words are few in the English language. His solution may do well enough where the realisations which they represent are mental ones or intuitions occurring on the summits of consciousness, rare 'high lights' over the low tones of ordinary natural or occult experience (ordinary, of course, to the poet, not the average man); there his solution would not violate the truth of the vision, would not misrepresent the balance of harmony of its actual tones. But what of one who lives in an atmosphere of these high lights—in a consciousness in which the finite, not only the occult but even the earthly finite, is bathed in the sense of the eternal, the illimitable infinite, the immensities or intimacies of the Timeless? To follow A.E.'s rule might well mean to falsify this atmosphere, to substitute a merely aesthetic fabrication for a true seeing and



experience. Truth first—a technique expressive of the truth in the forms of beauty has to be found, if it does not exist. It is no use arguing from the spiritual inadequacy of the English language; the inadequacy does not exist and even if it did, the language will have to be made adequate. It has been plastic enough in the past to succeed in expressing all that it was asked to express, however new; it must now be urged to a farther new progress. In fact the power is there and has only to be brought out more fully to serve the full occult, mystic, spiritual purpose.”

And then he went on in another letter:

“What you say may be correct (that our oriental luxury in poetry makes it unappealing to Westerners), but on the other hand it is possible that the mind of the future will be more international than it is now. In that case the expression of various temperaments in English poetry will have a chance.

“If our aim is not success and personal fame but to arrive at the expression of spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry, the English tongue is the most widespread and is capable of profound turns of mystic expression which make it admirably fitted for the purpose; if it could be used for the highest spiritual expression, that is worth trying.”

And then in another letter:

“The idea that Indians cannot succeed in English poetry is very much in the air just now but it cannot be taken as absolutely valid....At present many are turning to India for its sources of spirituality, but the eye has been directed



only towards Yoga and philosophy, not to the poetical expression of it. When the full day comes, however, it may well be that this too will be discovered, and then an Indian who is at once a mystic and a true poet and able to write in English as if in his mother-tongue (that is essential) would have his full chance. Many barriers are breaking, moreover, both in French and English there are instances of foreigners who have taken their place as prose-writers or poets."

I have been at some pains here to labour this point because I feel it necessary to combat the unhelpful attitude of those who cannot create and yet presume to adjudicate on our highly laudable attempt to express our deepest perceptions in English, as also because I feel sure, among other things, that Sri Aurobindo will be recognised in future not only as a poet but also as a poet-maker. It will take me too much space to bring out what I mean when I say this. So I will confine myself at present to saying that those of us who have seen not one, but many poets flower under his inspiration (some of whom had never before written a single poem) cannot possibly accept the verdicts of those who have no access to such data, for the simple reason that *no-experience* is incompetent *per se* to adjudicate on the validity or otherwise of *experience*.

But before I conclude my account of Sethna I must stress something about his poetic perspicacity and insight, the more because these native gifts, which matured rapidly under Gurudev's fostering, he utilised religiously not only to understand our Master's special contribution to poetry,

but—what is more important for the public—to pave the way to a more critical and deeper understanding of his genius by his luminous studies, in different journals, of Sri Aurobindo's form and message. I am myself definitely persuaded—even from what little I have imbibed with my limited receptivity of the supreme beauty of his epic *Savitri*—that he will be regarded as by far the greatest poet of this age, a new epoch-maker in poetry, or to quote from Sethna's own estimate:<sup>1</sup>

“On the brow of this giant we must place a crown of triple triumph. For, Sri Aurobindo has done three exceedingly rare things. First, he has to his credit a bulk of excellent blank verse—a statement possible about poets we can count on our fingers. At least five thousand lines in the *Collected Poems and Plays*, published a few years back, are a diversely modulated beauty and power with no appreciable fall below a fine adequacy and with peak after peak of superb frenzy. They put him cheek by jowl with Keats in both essence and amount. The huge epic *Savitri*, still unfinished, is a marvel which places him at once in the company of the absolute top-rankers by a sustained abundance of first-rate quality. Add to living lengths of blank verse a large number of sublime or delicate shorter pieces, mostly in rhyme, and we have a further testimony of Sri Aurobindo's creativeness. But what is of extraordinary import is that among them we have a body of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from his book, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*—(Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay).

successful work in a medium that has eluded English poets: quantitative metre. Sri Aurobindo has solved once for all the problem of quantity in English—a feat which gives the language ‘a brave new world’ of consciousness. Quantitative metre is the second tier in Sri Aurobindo’s poetic crown. The third is not merely a revelation of strange rhythm-moulds, but also the laying bare of a rhythmic life beyond the ranges of inspired consciousness to which we have been so far accustomed. To bring the epic surge or the lyric stream of the quantitative metres of Greece and Rome in English is not necessarily to go psychologically beyond the ranges of inspiration we find in the epic or lyric moods of England. It could very well be just an opening up of fresh movements on psychological planes already possessed by those moods. Over and above opening up such movements Sri Aurobindo discloses planes that have been secret hitherto except for stray lines here and there, occurring as if by a luminous accident. Only the ancient Vedas and Upanishads embody with anything like a royal freedom these ranges of mystical and spiritual being, hidden beyond the deepest plunge and highest leap of intuition known to the great masters. *Sri Aurobindo stands as the creator of a new Vedic and Upanishadic age of poetry.*”

I do not feel called upon to apologise for giving such a long quotation from Sethna’s book, the less because I cannot help a deep regret that we, Indians, who have already flowered, at our loveliest, into no mean creators in English poetry should have elected to cling to a cautious if not timid silence about Sri Aurobindo’s epic achievement



in poetry (an achievement which has been making history while we remain standing in a non-committal hush) simply because we want to play safe and so dare not give our verdicts lest our highbrow English tutors reverse it later on. I will not go into the cause of the unresponsiveness on the part of the English, but I feel I owe it to truth to speak out my deep conviction: that not to know Sri Aurobindo as a poet will be, in the near future, to argue oneself unknown as a critic and lover of poetry. Fortunately Krishnaprem (formerly Ronald Nixon) has made some atonement at least for the silence of his compatriots, the English, by writing in his tribute to *Savitri*:

“Such poetry can only be written either in the early days before the rise to power of self-conscious mind or when that particular cycle has run its course and life establishes itself once more in the unity beyond, this time with all the added range and power that has been gained during the reign of mind. It is an omen of the utmost significance and hope that in these years of darkness and despair such a poem as *Savitri* should have appeared. Let us salute the Dawn.”

And one must congratulate him—the more because he is English—on his courage for having anticipated a hackneyed objection thus: “The English language has been given to the world and its usages and limits can now no longer be determined exclusively by the ears of the islanders whose tongue it originally was. Those who would remain sole rulers of their language must abjure empire.” But to revert to Sethna.



I have felt this about him and a few others, isolated appraisers of Sri Aurobindo's poetry,<sup>1</sup> that when, in the not too-distant future, Sri Aurobindo will have been acknowledged by the whole world as by far the greatest of modern poets to whom the mantric word came as native as soaring to the eagle, this first small band of ardent admirers led by Sethna shall receive the smile of the great Goddess of Poetry, *Saraswati*, not only for having (in the words of Chesterton)

“.....watched when all men slept  
And seen the stars which never see the sun.”

but also for having readily acquitted themselves of their sacred responsibility, the sense of which prompted them to “salute the Dawn” they had seen and announce the high Herald of a new consciousness in poetry, who sang vibrantly of Earth's deepest aspiration and highest fulfilment:

An inarticulate whisper drives her steps  
Of which she feels the force but not the sense;  
A few rare intimations come as guides,  
Immense divining flashes cleave her brain...  
Outstretching arms to the unconscious Void,  
Passionate she prays to invisible forms of Gods,

<sup>1</sup> For there have been a few others like Sisir Kumar Ghosh of Shantiniketan, Srimati Latika Ghosh, Sri Rajanikant Modi, etc.

Soliciting from dumb Fate and toiling Time  
What most she needs, what most exceeds her scope,  
A Mind unvisited by illusion's gleams,  
A Will expressive of soul's deity,  
A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,  
A Joy that drags not sorrow as its shade.  
For these she yearns and feels them destined hers:  
Heaven's privilege she claims as her own right.  
Just is her claim the all-witnessing Gods approve,  
Clear in a greater light than reason owns:  
Our intuitions are its title-deeds;  
Our souls accept what our blind thoughts refuse.  
Earth's winged chimeras are Truth's steeds in Heaven,  
The impossible God's sign of things to be.<sup>1</sup>

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After Sethna it was Chadwick who came to impress me most. But I have not said one thing about Sethna which is too important to be left out—a particular quality of his which I could never admire sufficiently and which, I believe, Chadwick also appreciated, especially because he himself had much of it: the aspiration after perfection in everything one produces. I well remember how Sethna used, in the olden days, to type out poems that had made an impression on him. When he showed them to me he would take great pains to explain why he admired them and which lines

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book I, Canto IV

stood out. His intellect, sharp as a razor-blade, was always critical and wakeful but he did not let it get blunt or complacent with the laurels he went on winning. Rather he whetted it the more sleeplessly as he evolved and one of the reasons why he admired Sri Aurobindo so fervently was the fillip he always gave to this aspiration after perfection which was congenital with him. I recollect how Sethna's eyes used to fasten upon those parts of his poems which Sri Aurobindo had underlined and how it made him see, in minute detail, the relative inferiority of those which had not been so marked. I for one had never been able to scan the difference very clearly before Sethna told me, but when I saw what he meant, it did afford me a definite clarification if not actual illumination. Now that he has already amply fulfilled the prophecy of H. G. Wells who had remarked, on seeing an early essay of his, that "this young man will go far", I cannot help feeling a real joy which I stress thus because it is not nearly as personal as it looks. For every aspiration after perfection of a seeker belongs to all in the sense that all true seekers can claim not only to share in it but also to profit by it. That is why all who appreciate aspiration must delight in Sethna's clear thinking and his striving for perfection as the savour of its fruit improved continuously with time till all doubts were put out of court. This is not a mere tribute of a friend who may indeed be a little partial, but of one of the most eminent judges of mental clarity and deep insight—Krishnaprem—who wrote to me only the other day about Sethna's contributions in *Mother India*: "He writes brilliantly. I sometimes

think that his editorials are the only clear-thinking ones being written in India today. But what a world we live in! Darkness at noon! If we did not know that nothing can escape from Sri Krishna's hands, the prospect would be one of utter blackness."

To come now to Chadwick. His temperament accorded in many ways with mine, and he always helped me by correcting my English poems which he liked very much, he said. His deep mastery of the technique of English poetry left a lasting impression on my mind eager to possess English prosody. He too in his turn wanted to profit by what little I could tell him about our music which he came gradually to love, so much so that one day after hearing a few hymns to Krishna which I sang for him he wrote, in his poem, *Musician*:

Splendour beyond conceiving  
wave against wave  
of swirling light uprear their sinuous crests  
and are thrust forward in a seething foam  
of melody  
within the listening coves  
and over the untrod sandways  
of the heart!

Once a friend of mine, Madame Miller, visited the Ashram. She was a Viennese and a famous opera-singer and we sang together a song of Chopin: "In mir klingt ein Lied." Then she sang a number of solos. Chadwick was





almost petitioning him to shed light on his super-brilliant and yet avid, famished mind. Few people know how deep was his reverence for Sri Aurobindo's achievements in poetry even in the 'thirties when we used to hear breath-taking rumours of *Savitri* still in deep purdah. Chadwick and I once reminded him of it in concert but Sri Aurobindo only wrote back that he wanted to revise it thoroughly but had "no time to dally with the Muses." "It's the Supramental", Chadwick used to whisper to me in a mock-solemn tone. And I used generally to retort something irreverent about the Supramental looking very much like leaving us in the lurch, at which he would chuckle in glee. And then, becoming grave like a tomb: "But I ought to repent if not tremble, Dilip, since *we* believe in blasphemy, if *you* don't!" Then more seriously: "But I do like this, you know, your cracking jokes with Gurudev!"

Often I showed him Gurudev's repartees. A sample:

I had written after a talk with Chadwick about the Christian conception of the sheep (parishioners) and the Shepherd (the pastor, I believe): "Well, Guru, since Chadwick has driven me to the wall (how can I cope with him in argument?) I will try henceforth to bleat faith and humility like a trembling lamb and not roar doubts like a dying lion."

To which Gurudev answered: "Good, especially because one must be the lamb of God before being His lion."

And how Chadwick laughed! His English sense of humour and his mischievous chuckle always refreshed me after I had my fill of the sombre faces around me. It was thus that our affection grew through levity, music, poetry and

day to day struggles with our egos. "But it's all *maya*, Chadwick," I often told him, specially when he felt gloomy about the deplorable state of the world to which "we also were contributing", as Chadwick used to remark. But that was just why he worshipped Sri Aurobindo to whom he had dedicated an exquisite poem. I loved it and read it out to my friends and posted copies of it to our enemies, because the tribute here was from a brilliant Englishman and not a lack-lustre Indian:

## RED LOTUS

(SRI AUROBINDO'S CONSCIOUSNESS)

That living Lotus, petal by petal unfolding,  
Which through the mists of this *avidya* looms,  
Vicegerent of the Sun, nowise withholding  
The light we lack in *Maya*'s nether glooms.

O puissant heart amidst whose raptured shrining  
A nameless Love is garbed in Name's disguise,  
Last metronome to mortal things assigning  
A fadeless rhythm wrung from Dawn's echoing skies.<sup>1</sup>

"A nameless Love is garbed in Name's disguise"—the line came to me in a haunting strain in those days for a

<sup>1</sup> I have quoted only two out of the four verses he wrote. See his *Poems*, p. 177

twofold reason: first because he weaved with the magic of his rhythm and psychic emotion, vigilantly controlled by his English austerity, an aura round Sri Aurobindo which was as real in its beauty as it was opulent in its mystic implications and secondly, because he expressed with his exquisite diction an adoration which was even more potent for its rich suggestiveness than for its immediate content of meaning. Every time I read his poems I realised anew as it were what he had meant when he had once said to me, half-apologetically: "Do not think that the English as a race baulk at emotion, Dilip. Quite the contrary. We are a race with a rich background of profound emotion, the stuff poets are made of. But we are shy. What I mean is that while you, Bengalis, sail exultantly on the crest of your emotion—we, English, don't like to be caught expressing our feelings too vividly. If you do not understand that, you miss something very important about our inner make-up."

But there was something else which was borne home to me through his poems which I must attempt to describe as it opened to me a new vista, so to speak, especially when he recited them with his delicately-cadenced inflexion: I got rich glimpses through his authentic English pronunciation—with its accent, caesura and intonation—of something akin to a revelation about the capacity of melody inherent in English poetry. To explain this I shall have to go back a little.

It so happened that at the time Sri Aurobindo was graciously experimenting, at my request, with some Bengali



poems of mine and giving me, day after marvellous day, exquisite English counterparts to the samples I sent up. The poems he composed showed an astonishing correspondence, in lilt and accent, with the samples I sent him of our Bengali bases. (I was just then experimenting in the converse direction—which he encouraged and enjoyed to the full: I was trying to transcribe English bases with their modulations and stresses into Bengali about which I shall have more to write later on.) In the course of such researches I once claimed that Bengali was richer in melody and variety of metrical structures if not in suggestiveness and substance. Whereupon he, after warning me that my “estimate was marred by the personal or national habit” and conceding that the English language is not naturally melodious like the Italian and Bengali—no language with a Teutonic base can be”; added that “it is capable of remarkable harmonic effects and also it can, by a skilful handling, be made to give out the most beautiful melodies.”

I was still a little unconvinced about this, naturally—as I was to realise later—because I had hitherto neither made a serious study of English verse nor developed an ear for what Sri Aurobindo meant when he wrote to me that, unlike Bengali and Italian, “English is difficult and has to be struggled with in order to produce its best effects, but out of that very difficulty has arisen an astonishing plasticity, depth and manifold subtlety of rhythm.” This was borne home to me by Chadwick’s poems and, incidentally, made me realise how inept my remarks had been. For I remember that in the beginning I could not vividly feel the beauty

of his poems, but as I was in those days writing English poems myself under his, Sethna's and Gurudev's tuition, I was thrilled to discover one fine morning that I had grown richly alive to the lovely melodic effects he wove in many of his poems—so suddenly that I was reminded of a letter of Sri Aurobindo's in which he consoled me for my inability to be similarly receptive to painting.

"Don't be desperate," he wrote in a colloquial style, "about your incapacity as a connoisseur of painting. I was far worse in this respect; knew something about sculpture, but blind to painting. Suddenly, one day, in the Alipore jail, while meditating, I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and lo and behold! the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique. I don't always know how to express, though, because I lack the knowledge of the proper expressions, but that does not stand in the way of a keen and understanding appreciation. So, there you are: all things are possible in Yoga."

I labour this point because Chadwick himself achieved a somewhat similar feat in poetry—"struggling and striving to listen with the inner ear"—till one day something opened in him, as he told me once, and he went on producing, one after another, his lovely lyrics which delighted everybody, as e.g. when he wrote his poems on Laelia on which Sri Aurobindo bestowed superlative praise:

For the moon-pale feet of Laelia the still night sheddeth  
dew,

Or at noon in the white-rose garden—doomed with a  
trance of blue—  
Blossoms with jade-white petals before her feet are shed  
And fall from the dreaming rose-trees, with never a leaf  
of red.

Your name is fading music upon my worship's mouth;  
It spills in langorous fragrance from lilies of the South;  
It is the odorous night-flower wherewith your locks are  
bound,—  
Or the moon-pale soul of roses caught in a mesh of  
sound!

I experienced something akin to ecstasy when he used to recite:

"Your name is fading music upon my worship's mouth;"

as it made me realise in a new way what Sri Aurobindo termed "psychic inspiration" in a letter to me in 1931 when I tried to translate Shelley's famous lines:

I can give not what men call love,  
But wilt thou accept not

<sup>1</sup> I have quoted only two verses to economise space, as well as because to quote long poems in prose is undesirable. But lovers of melody in English poetry must read his poems on *Lealia* and *Moon* inspired by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The worship the heart lifts above  
And the heavens reject not:  
The desire of the moth for the star,  
Of the night for the morrow,—  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow?

I must quote his letter in full as it will partly explain why he bestowed such lavish praise on Chadwick's poems.

"Your translation of Shelley's poem is vulnerable in the head and the tail. In the head, because it seems to me that your words are open to the construction that human love is a rich and precious thing which the poet in question unfortunately does not possess and it is only because of this deplorable poverty that he offers the psychic devotion, less warm and rich and desirable, but still in its own way rare and valuable! I exaggerate perhaps, but, as your lines are open to a meaning of this kind, it tends to convey the very reverse of Shelley's intended significance. For in English 'What men call love' is strongly depreciatory and can only mean something inferior, something that is poor and not rich, not truly love. Shelley says in substance: 'Human vital love is a poor inferior thing, a counterfeit of true love, which I cannot offer you. But there is a greater thing, a true psychic love, all worship and devotion, which men do not readily value, being led away by the vital glamour, but which the Heavens do not reject though it is offered from something so far below them, so maimed and ignorant and sorrow-vexed as the human consciousness



which is to the divine consciousness as the moth is to the star, as the night is to the day. And will you not accept this from me, you, who in your nature are kin to the Heavens, you, who seem to me to have something of the divine nature, to be something bright and happy and pure far above the sphere of our sorrow? Of course all that is not said but only suggested, but it is obviously the spirit of the poem,—and it is this spirit in it that made me write to Amal the other day that it would be perhaps impossible to find in English literature a more perfect example of psychic inspiration than these eight lines you have translated....As to the tail, I doubt whether your last line brings out the sense of 'something afar from the sphere of our sorrow.' If I make these criticisms at all, it is because you have accustomed me to find in you a power of rendering the spirit and sense of the original while turning it into fine poetry in its new tongue which I would not expect or exact from any other translator."

Much as I would like to, I cannot enlarge further on Chadwick's poetry for exigencies of space as also for the fact that I must not, in focussing too much light on his poetic achievements, lay myself open to the charge of throwing into the shade a much more important aspect of his personality, namely, his spiritual aspiration which made him leave his country, family and even his English habits and cleave unwaveringly to the lead given by Gurudev—even when he knew that his days were numbered. But before that I must speak of another side to his nature which made him love Sri Aurobindo: his love of liberty which made

him abhor all forms of dogmatism, fanaticism, and collective tyranny which the devotees of dictatorship worship the world over. He used to emphasise often with a subdued accent of rapturous admiration Sri Aurobindo's "oceanic tolerance and catholicity of spirit" which made him write in his *Synthesis of Yoga*:

"The *sadhaka* of the integral Yoga will make use of all these aids according to his nature; but it is necessary that he should shun their limitations and cast from himself that exclusive tendency of the egoistic mind which cries, 'My God, my Incarnation, my Prophet, my Guru' and opposes it to all other realisation in a sectarian or a fanatical spirit. All sectarianism, all fanaticism must be shunned; for it is inconsistent with the integrity of the divine realisation.

"On the contrary, the *sadhaka* of the integral Yoga will not be satisfied until he has included all other names and forms of Deity in his own conception, seen his own Ishta Devata in all others, unified all Avatars in the unity of Him who descends in the Avatar, welded the truth in all teachings into the harmony of the Eternal Wisdom."

"I realise, Dilip," he used to tell me now and then, "how hard it must be for you to be fair to us, Englishmen, the more because we have been far from fair to you. But believe me, the real Englishman abhors nothing so much as an inroad into personal liberty. Russell is an instance in point. I consider him great—in spite of his obvious limitations—because he typifies in him two great traits of the English character at its best: love of fairness and love of individual freedom. That is why I feel often a trifle sad

when some of you talk as though there were little to choose between the Nazi or Russian tyranny and the British. Don't misunderstand me. I cannot, as you know, possibly approve of our imperialists who talk of the empire and Rule Britannia. But I tell you that if the British were capable of responding to the philosophy of Marx and totalitarianism, the world today would soon cease to be a fit place for any man who calls himself civilised." How prophetic he had been was amply attested within a few years when, after the fall of Dunkirk, England stood alone for a whole year against the triple alliance of Germany, Japan and Italy while Russia stood by, having made that infamous pact with Hitler. But in those days (before 1939)—with Hitler still in the offing—we ignored him, the more because we disliked the British tyranny so much and knew of Hitler so little. No wonder many of us could not fully respond to Chadwick's justified abhorrence of totalitarian imperialism. I remember also how I loathed the British imperialism with all my heart. So once or twice there was a strain between us when it was I who was to blame in that I was intolerant and so failed to realise fully the innate greatness of his nature which had made him cut away from his moorings in spite of the opposition of his friends and relations, and the deep discomfort he stood up to in choosing to stay with those who so often lost sight of his noble nature because of the veil of his shy refinement and British reserve. I must confess I truly realised this only after his death in 1938. I was not, at the time, in Pondicherry; when I returned I was told how resolutely he had



refused to return to England for better medical treatment. "I would die in India where my Guru is," he said and he did, not wavering once from his vow even when he was desperately ill.

When I look back in retrospect, I see that I have come to love the British primarily because of three men: Bertrand Russell, Krishnaprem (alias Ronald Nixon) and Chadwick. Of these Chadwick was distinctive in a peculiar way. For while Russell remained British and Krishnaprem became out and out a Hindu, only Chadwick combined in him the rich, aristocratic refinement of the British at its loftiest with a rich responsiveness to an Indian outlook on life and on the Guru which his love of individuality must have found not a little difficult to undersign. How strongly this love had taken root was expressed in his poem entitled 'Totalitarian' which made me fully alive, for the first time, to the infernal horror it symbolized. That what he had seen in 1936 (when it was composed) proved to be literally true subsequently, during the dark days of the Hitlerian hell-regime, must testify to the authentic power of vision that had lain latent in his nature, a power which opened in him under the aegis of Sri Aurobindo. With this much by way of introduction I shall now give the poem:

Night was closing on the traveller  
When he came  
To the empty eerie courtyard  
With no name.



Loud he called; no echo answered;  
Nothing stirred:  
But a crescent moon swung wanly,  
White as curd.  
When he flashed his single sword-blade  
Through the gloom,  
None resisted—till he frantic,  
Filled with doom,  
Hurled his weapon through the gloaming,  
Took no aim;  
Saw his likenesses around him  
Do the same:  
Viewed a thousand swordless figures  
Like his own—  
Then first knew in that cold starlight  
Hell, alone.

Sri Aurobindo was deeply impressed by this poem and considered it as, among other things, strikingly original. On learning this, Sethna invited his comment on it drawing his attention to Walter de la Mare's poem, *The Listeners*, to which it seemed to bear some affinity:

"De la Mare's poem has a delicate beauty throughout and a sort of daintily fanciful suggestion of the occult world. I do not know if there is anything more. The weakness of it is that it reads like a thing imagined—the images and details are those that might be written of a haunted house on earth which has got possessed by some occult presences. Arjava must no doubt have taken his starting point from a remini-

science of this poem, but there is nothing else common with De la Mare—his poem is an extraordinarily energetic and powerful vision of an occult world and every phrase is intimately evocative of the beyond as a thing vividly seen and strongly lived—it is not on earth, this courtyard and this crescent moon, we are at once in an unearthly world and in a place somewhere in the soul of man and all the details, sparing, with a powerful economy of phrase and image and brevity of movement but revelatory in each touch as opposed to the dim moonlight suggestions supported by a profusion of detail and long elaborating development in De la Mare—of course that has its value also—make us entirely feel ourselves there. I therefore maintain my description 'original' not only for the latter part of the poem but for the opening, also. It is not an echo, it is an independent creation. Indeed the difference of the two poems comes out most strongly in these very (first eight) lines.

The faint moonbeams on the dark stair  
That goes down to the empty hall...  
The dark turf 'neath the starred and leafy sky...

are a description of things on earth made occult only by the presence of the phantom listeners. But

...the empty eerie courtyard  
With no name

or

...a crescent moon swung wanly,  
White as curd

are not earthly, they belong to a terrible elsewhere, while the latter part of the poem carries the elsewhere into a province of the soul. This is the distinction that makes the perfect successfulness of Arjava's<sup>1</sup> poem."

But I must come now to his deepest aspiration which impelled him to turn to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and made him "on wings of faith mount up toward the solar fire" as he put it in his poem entitled *Wings*.

I put the name of the Mother first as in his case (unlike my own) it was she who gripped him first. It came about like this.

One morning as I was experimenting with a new metre in Bengali—it was in 1930 I think—I was told by someone that an Englishman, one Professor Chadwick from Lucknow, wanted to see me.

He came with a letter of introduction from my old friend, Professor D. P. Mukherji. There was something striking in his face which drew me at once to him, the more as he looked rather delicate and walked with a limp.

Before I give the substance of our conversation, I must remind the reader that I am concerned with giving but the gist of what passed between us as I cannot possibly remember all that we talked about on that day.

"I came to India," he said, "in quest of a spiritual wisdom in which she is rich and of which Europe is definitely bankrupt today."

<sup>1</sup> The name Sri Aurobindo gave to Chadwick. It is a Sanskrit word meaning simplicity, straightforwardness.

"And then?"

"Well, I am going back—home."

"But you are still a professor in Lucknow, I understand?"

"Yes," he smiled, "but I am going to resign directly. Because..." he added, "I came here to learn—not to teach."

I was reminded at once of Krishnaprem whose name I mentioned.

"I know him," he nodded, "and he has got something, I felt. But not I."

"Have you read anything of Sri Aurobindo?" I asked, after a pause.

"Not yet," he answered almost apologetically, "though I have bought some of his books here. But," he added after a pause, "it is not books I thirst for. I want something more—concrete and living."

He spoke hesitantly and blushed every now and then.

"I quite understand," I said blandly. "But Sri Aurobindo does not write books for the pastime of word-spinning. He throws out rich clues to the concrete. Here, at least, I speak from experience, not book-lore."

"I am afraid you have misunderstood me a little," he flustered again, "I didn't exactly want to convey that—but never mind. The point is: I *am* disappointed. My fault I suppose. But then," he smiled shyly, "I am perhaps too English to the core and therefore a little opaque, inevitably, to what you in India call the light of the spirit."

It was my turn to feel embarrassed now.

"I didn't mean it as a reproach," I pleaded. "But perhaps you have also misunderstood me a little. I wish you had



come here when Sri Aurobindo could be seen. For to see him is to cease to be 'opaque.' For he is built of the stuff light is made of and it is a light that speaks."

"I wish so too," he said ruefully. "For I have heard so much about the radiance that resides in him. But it is not to be. I am sailing soon."

"And you won't come back?"

He shook his head. "Not likely. Why should I, since no light has spoken to *me*, so far?"

A silence fell.

"Would you care to see the Mother?" I suggested at a venture, for something to say.

He gave me a quick look.

"The Mother? Who is she?"

In those days (in the 'thirties) the Mother was very little known outside. So I chased away an upsurge, a feeling of disappointment. Besides, he looked so sincere and ingenuous—almost guileless! I told him a good deal about her and her sweet personality. But I ended with a friendly note of warning.

"But you see, hers is a personality that grows on one," I hazarded diffidently. "For I know several persons on whom she had made very little impression at the start—but who, with time, have come to worship the very ground she treads." No sooner had I made the last remark than I rued my impulsiveness.

"I thank you very much for telling me," he said. "And you may be sure I would like to see her very much. But the point is would *she* care to see me?"

"Well, I can at least ask her," I answered. "Only—" He fixed me with a steady scrutiny.

"I will be frank with you," I said with an awkward smile, "though Mother says I am often a wee bit too frank with the wrong kind. But as you are different—"

"Oh, thank you," he laughed. "I hope I won't let you down."

That decided me. For though normally he looked rather taciturn, his face changed entirely when he laughed. It cleared up the atmosphere instantly.

"It seems unlikely," I said returning his laughter. "But listen, it's like this. I came here only the other day, so to say, and know very little about Yoga and its occult wisdom and perhaps understand even less the ways of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. For instance I have seen Mother take certain decisions but her reasons have, as often as not, left me guessing. Naturally I am drawn to her—otherwise I would not be able to stay here even a month, not to mention a year—but my acceptance of her being hedged about with uncertainties I do not know how far she tallies in reality with my mental picture of her. But I hold her in high esteem for all that, and therefore must make one request to you: in case you are disappointed with her, please keep it to yourself as otherwise you would be hurting the feelings of us all who owe her loyalty because she is, in effect, as much our Guru as Sri Aurobindo, if you know what I mean."

He gave me a patient hearing and looked grave.

"I understand," he said with his characteristic refined nod of the head, "and you may be sure that I shall not

only approach her with humility but give her all the respect that is her due."

"I am much relieved," I answered, cheerfully now. "You must let me tell you something else. I said just now that I know very little about Mother and Sri Aurobindo. But this I do know that they are made of a very different stuff from that of most men I have met. To give just one instance. I have met many Gurus. These invite eminent disciples, generally speaking. But not Mother and Sri Aurobindo.<sup>1</sup> In fact he has given us to understand that we are not to persuade anybody even to see them, far less to accept them." And, I went on to add a little hesitantly, "I have a feeling that they are none-too-eager to invite the merely-curious or the complacent intellectuals who want to have easy interviews to be able to air their opinions on things utterly beyond their ken."

He took in the sting in the tail unflinchingly. Then he lowered his eyes shyly as was his wont and smiled as it were to himself. Then suddenly he lifted his eyes to mine. His face was flushed again.

"You have put it well," he said, laughing once more. "Perhaps a little too well, if you will pardon me for saying so. But," he added a trifle ironically, "though I can't deny my past and so must be labelled an 'intellectual' as you put it—

<sup>1</sup> "Well-known or unknown has absolutely no importance from the spiritual point of view. It is simply the propagandist spirit. We are not a party or a church or religion seeking adherents or proselytes. One man who earnestly pursues the Yoga is of more value than a thousand well-known men." This he wrote subsequently in a letter, in 1935.

believe me, I didn't come here to stay where I am. For I came here to win a passport, if I could, to your time-old wisdom of the spirit—and that as a seeker, not a critic."

I was impressed by the note of transcendent sincerity in his delicately-cadenced voice and strikingly-intellectual physiognomy. Besides, his face looked so emaciated and pale that it touched a chord in my heart.

I went straight to the Mother. She gave him an appointment the next morning in our library down-stairs.

He was shy—to the point of being tongue-tied and did not ask many questions. The few he did ask I do not remember. I only remember Mother putting to him some questions on her own.

"I understand from Dilip that you want spiritual wisdom", she began in her characteristic manner—simple and direct yet sympathetic and interested.

He flushed—almost fidgeted—under her calm scrutiny. "That's right."

"Why?" she asked.

He looked at her, reddened once more, then answered in a low voice:

"Because I find life void of meaning and am persuaded that only spiritual wisdom can fill the void."

"I understand," Mother answered in a kind tone. "And then?"

He lifted his eyes to hers just for a split second.

"I came to India to find it. But—I didn't find it."

Mother smiled, then said:



"One receives in the measure of one's receptivity." He winced. A little after, he queried:

"How is one to grow in receptivity?"

"By sincerity and trust. Sincerity in one's seeking and trust in the Divine Grace." Then after a pause: "Sincerity you have. Only you must learn to accept that you can get the response you want in proportion to your trust in Grace."

She spoke with such an utter simplicity that my heart misgave me. How could an intellectual of his type respond to such a simple call, I wondered! Surely it was not for this he had "crossed the seven seas," to put it in the words of Krishnaprem.

I went to see him at the station that evening. Just before the train left he made a remark which I shall never forget.

"Why did you feel so diffident about her? I have never been so *overwhelmed* by anyone as I was by her this morning."

His stress on the word "overwhelmed" I found overwhelming! Why, Mother had hardly had a real talk with him!

And yet that one brief interview changed the whole course of his life. A few months afterwards he wrote to me a letter, from England, asking me very simply if Mother would accept him. She did and he came a month later and stayed with me for some time. Then he wanted more solitude. Mother gave him a flat where he lived in an almost cloistered seclusion, day after lonely day, writing poetry and meditating. Occasionally he visited me to help me in my English poetry or else to listen to my music which he loved passionately.

One morning he called on me and showed me a letter he had just received from Gurudev. And he read it out to me in great delight:

"As for acquiring the sense and the power of rhythm, reading the poets may do something, but not all. There are two factors in poetic rhythm,—the technique (the variation of movement without spoiling the fundamental structure, right management of vowel and consonantal assonances and dissonances, the masterful combination of the musical element of stress with the less obvious element of quantity) and the secret soul of rhythm which uses but exceeds these things. The first you can learn, if you read with your ear always in a *tapasya* of vigilant attention to these constituents; but without the second what you achieve may be technically faultless and even skilful but poetically a dead letter. This soul of rhythm can only be found by listening in to what is behind the music of words and sound of things. You can get something of it by listening for that subtler element in great poetry, but mostly it must either grow or suddenly open in yourself. This sudden opening is what can come in Yoga if the power wishes to express itself in that way. I have seen both in myself and others a sudden flowering of capacities in every kind of activity come by the opening of consciousness,—so that one who laboured long without the least success to express himself in rhythm becomes a master of poetic language and cadences in a day. It is a question of the right silence in the mind and the right openness to Word that is trying to express itself—for the Word is there ready formed in

those inner planes where all artistic forms take birth, but it is the transmitting mind that must change and become a perfect channel and not an obstacle."

I congratulated him.

"So that is how you have so suddenly blossomed into a poet, have you?—because 'something suddenly opened in yourself'?"

"Well, I have been turning out verses," he laughed, flushing. "But to be a poet—it's not nearly so easy, you know. I have to concentrate hard to produce a single poem."

"Yes, Nirod told me about your British doggedness once, I think."

"I mean to persevere," he answered, "the more as Sri Aurobindo has been kind enough to encourage me."

"He always does," I agreed. "He has taken no end of trouble for me; has even translated some of my Bengali poems into English, fancy that!"

A few days later he met me in the Ashram and told me that he had again a present to make to me: another letter from Gurudev.

I invited him to tea in great joy.

"I have got something which will delight you, Dilip," he said, as I handed him his cup. "For he has paid the Christian back in his own coin, if you know what I mean."

(We had had a somewhat hot debate, a few days before this, on Christianity versus Hinduism.)

His humility always moved me—the more as I was myself very sensitive and never could smile if and when Gurudev or the Mother frowned. Then he read it out to me:



"Arjava,

It is especially difficult for the Christian to be of a piece, because the teachings of Christ are on quite another plane from the consciousness of the intellectual and vital man trained by the education and society of Europe—the latter, even as a minister or priest, has never been called upon to practise what he preached in entire earnest. But it is difficult for human nature anywhere to think, feel and act from one centre of true faith, belief or vision. The average Hindu considers the spiritual life the highest, reveres the *sannyasi*, is moved by the *bhakta*; but if one of the family circle leaves the world for spiritual life, what tears, remonstrances, lamentations! It is almost worse than if he had died a natural death. It is not conscious mental insincerity—they will argue like Pundits and quote *shastra* to prove you in the wrong; it is unconsciousness, a vital insincerity which they are not aware of and which uses the reasoning mind as an accomplice.

"That is why we insist so much on sincerity in the Yoga—and that means to have all the being consciously turned towards the one Truth—the one Divine. But that is, for human nature one of the most difficult of tasks, much more difficult than a rigid asceticism or a fervent piety. Religion itself does not give this complete harmonised sincerity—it is only the psychic being and the one-souled spiritual aspiration that can give it."

"How beautifully he writes, Dilip!" Chadwick remarked. "How crystal clear! Not a trace of haziness anywhere. No abracadabra, wanting to show off and yet



how luminous—shedding light without heat—like his eyes!”

He talked like that. Never effusive but always conveying luminously something he deeply felt.

He told me once that he was not going to live long. I don't know still the nature of his last ailment, but his health had been undermined by shell-shock and he had always been exceedingly nervous by temperament. Also he suffered much and long whenever there was a friction between him and others. And every time this happened he retired into a deeper seclusion, till in the end he became almost a recluse. I met him indeed in the Ashram where we went daily to have the Mother's blessings. But though he always greeted me cordially, he looked more and more distant. I used to feel a little pain at his deepening retirement, but when I read his poems which he sent me from time to time, I felt amply compensated. He had indeed blossomed out into a fine poet! Also he showed me some of the letters that had passed between him and Sri Aurobindo relating to English metres. I was overjoyed as these helped me materially besides making me realise how much he had profited by Gurudev's craftsmanship and mastery over the intricacies of the English metre. He used to go into ecstasies over his new experiments in quantitative metres!

But I am afraid I am tending to grow “prolix”—an epithet he often used by way of disapproval. So I must now come to the end of my story.

When his health deteriorated, I felt a little anxious and one day when he came at my request to read out to me some

of his latest poems—it was for the last time—I asked him why he looked so pale and emaciated.

“I haven’t been keeping good health lately, Dilip,” he said simply. “But it’s no use worrying. And then I never had your robust health, you know. What energy you have! I envy you!”

“Never mind about my energy,” I deprecated. “But why don’t you go back home for a change?”

“No. Whatever is to happen must happen *here*. I will *not* go back to my people though they are writing letter after letter. No, Dilip, let’s talk of something more worth while. What have you been writing of late?”

“I have been translating some poems. Here is one from a Hindi song of Abul Hafiz Jalandhari.<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo has given it special praise.”

He read it and suggested just one or two minor changes; then said: “You have now learnt to handle our iambics, Dilip. Congratulations.”

“But wait a minute—where are *your* poems?”

“Well, here are two I wrote last month.”

And he read them out beautifully. I shall give only the closing verse of each:

O hearts that are empty of giving,  
Lips that lie famished for song,  
How you hiddenly hunger for living  
And dream to the star-born throng.

<sup>1</sup> The poem is entitled “Pledge” in my book *Eyes of Light*.

And then:

O running of Light in the Silence  
O silvery morning star,  
May the Dawn be the wordless answer  
Of beauty no loss can mar.<sup>1</sup>

"Beautiful," I said, "though a trifle sad."

"But life is not very jolly, Dilip—it never has been."

"But it *shall* be."

"I'd like to believe that," he said after a pause, "and only because..." he looked at me and added: "because I came to know them—him and the Mother."

After his passing away in 1938 his poems were sent to Krishnaprem. I feel there can be no more fitting epitaph to the great departed than his beautiful Foreword:

"It must be now twelve years since Chadwick and I sat together on the banks of the Ganges at Benares, talking far into the night of dreams that lay close to our hearts, dreams that had brought us together as they had brought us both to India. Of his past I knew little save that it included a fellowship at, I think, Trinity College Cambridge, and that a distinguished Cambridge philosopher entertained great hopes from his brilliant abilities in mathematical philosophy of the specifically 'Cambridge' sort. Somewhere between the chinks of his academic career I surmised an initiation into the Kabalistic tradition and there was that in his eyes

<sup>1</sup> *Poems by Arjava*, pp. 285-86

which showed unmistakably that it was not for the sake of a professorship in a provincial university that he had left his friends at Cambridge and crossed the seven seas.

"Once more we met in a university bungalow at Lucknow, a background that I think we both found to be an utter irrelevance, and then we departed, I to the North and he to the South where he had found his Guru in Sri Aurobindo. There in the Ashram in Pondicherry, he lived for the last ten years, shedding at the feet of his Guru the burden of all that the world counts valuable in order to find the hidden treasures for which most men have no eyes.

"Of his life and *sadhana* there under the name of Arjava it is not for me to speak. That it brought about a profound psychic transformation in his nature is clear from the fact that he, whose language had hitherto been limited to the arid propositions of intellectual philosophy, became a poet and, with the aid of poetry, entered the inner worlds of which, till then, he had but dreamed.

"Traditionalists and those who take a narrow view of *sadhana* will perhaps wonder what poetry has to do with Yoga. The truth is that the reintegration of the psyche that is brought about in *sadhana* has the effect of releasing unsuspected powers that were lying latent in the heart of the *sadhaka*, as indeed, they are in the hearts of all. We read in books of Yoga that 'by meditating on Her who shines in the Root Lotus with the lustre of ten million Suns, a man becomes a Lord of Speech and...pure of heart, by his deep and musical words, serves the greatest of Gods.' The truth of such words, nowadays too often assumed to



be mere empty praise, is witnessed to by these poems left behind by Arjava when, at what seems to us the early age of forty, the Sovereign Dweller in his heart decided to withdraw to inner worlds.

"The mere literary critic will admire the delicate dream-like beauty of these poems, but, unless his insight is more than merely literary, he will go no deeper, for they deal with the mysteries of the inner life and only he who can read their symbols will be able to penetrate to their heart. For Arjava, as is shown in the poem entitled *Correspondences*, Nature was a shrine in which each form seen in the flickering firelight of the senses was a shadow of realities that lay within, shining in the magical light of the secret Moon which was the Master-light of all his seeing, the central image of so many of his poems.

"In the midst of our personal sadness at his early departure let us remember that this path is one which leads through many worlds and that, as Sri Krishna said, *nehabhikrama nasho'sti*, for him who treads it there can be no loss of effort."

## CHAPTER VII

### "BLEEDING PIECE OF EARTH"<sup>1</sup>

ONE of the things that make Ashram life so hard to bear is that it first invites one to change, then exhorts, then coaxes and lastly presses one to realise that unless and until one agrees to change progressively, the divine life must remain a Utopian dream. Somebody said that human folly makes even the angels weep. In my childhood days when I read somewhere in our epic, the *Mahabharata*, that it was easier to do something than to undo it. That is why, it was contended, Abhimanyu, the boy hero, could break into the phalanx of his enemies but not retrace his steps. Sri Aurobindo has emphasised again and again the egregious nature of human folly which is responsible for this. Not folly alone but some kind of "contrariness" in the scheme of things—an insurmountable snag—which made even a Vivekananda cry out: "The scheme of the world is devilish, I could have made a better world." The sigh is as old as the

<sup>1</sup> Antony (to the dead body of Caesar):

O! pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth.....  
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man  
That ever lived in the tide of times.

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene 1

sky. Somehow things insist on going awry progressively no matter what we will or do. That is why the word 'fatality' has come to exercise an almost hypnotic influence on the minds of even the most robust among men. Sri Aurobindo has underlined the tragedy of this seeming fatality (I stress the word 'seeming' because he does not accept fatality or its foster-child astrology except in a very modified sense) in his epic *Savitri* in the mouth of the pessimist fatalist Queen-mother. She expounds it, indeed, as her own individual point of view but who will dare deny, when one looks at man and the world as they are, that it is almost completely convincing so far as it goes:

As if the world's stone load was not enough,  
A crop of miseries obstinately is sown  
By his own hands in the furrows of the gods,  
The vast increasing tragic harvest reaped  
From old misdeeds buried by oblivious Time.  
He walks by his own choice into hell's trap;  
This mortal creature is his own worst foe.  
His science is an artificer of doom;  
He ransacks earth for means to harm his kind;  
He slays his happiness and others' good.  
Nothing has he learnt from time and its history;  
Even as of old in the raw youth of Time,  
When earth ignorant ran on the highways of Fate,  
Old forms of evil cling to the world's soul:  
War making nought the sweet smiling calm of life,  
Battle and rapine, ruin and massacre

Are still the fierce pastimes of man's warring tribes;  
An idiot hour destroys what centuries made,  
His wanton rage or frenzied hate lays low  
The beauty and greatness by his genius wrought  
And the mighty output of a nation's toil.<sup>1</sup>

A few weeks ago a Korean lady wrote to Pundit Nehru a letter in which she deplored how even those who came as champions of the safety of Korea were responsible for unleashing further devastation on the poor country. To state just one single act and follow its concatenation of consequences: the south Korean capital Seoul was bombarded by the North Koreans who professed to come as its liberators. Result—devastation, followed by the retreat of the invaders in occupation: the North Koreans. Next, enter the Chinese Communists, they bombard mightily. Result—deeper devastation, followed by retreat once more of the liberators in occupation: the South Koreans and the Americans. Then the Americans bombard Seoul again to liberate Korea once more from its old "liberators" to be followed by the counter-attack of the Chinese and so it goes on. But after such vicious bombardments of "liberation" how much of the unhappy town can possibly survive? The same thing happened with Poyangang, the capital of North Korea: first came the South Koreans who devastated it—this time as the liberators *en revanche*, next the North Korean followed by the Chinese communists the latest liberator

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from *Savitri* in this chapter, are from Book VI (The Book of Fate).



now in occupation, to be possibly supplanted once more by the South Koreans—almost like a perpetual-motion pendulum!

Now it must be remembered that only one act was responsible for all this: the crossing of the 38th parallel by the North Koreans as “liberators” (whatever the word may mean). Not even their worst enemies would assert that they could have anticipated the release of such an avalanche of calamities as the result of just one button pressed: their crossing of a geographical line. And it was not an accident: unforeseen catastrophes have been brought off again and again in history by just one misdemeanour, one outrage, one miscalculation. Was Sri Aurobindo guilty of an overstress when he wrote: ‘An idiot hour destroys what centuries made’?

I remember his reply, long ago in 1924, to my question on “the wide-spread misery, fear and suffering which afflict men”:

“How can you help that so long as men choose as they do to hug ignorance which is at the root of all suffering? As long as they cherish the darkness of attachment rather than the light of liberation and knowledge, how can they expect to see?”<sup>1</sup> Years later he developed his outlook on pain, its rationale, in his *Savitri*, hinting that although,

Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come,

<sup>1</sup> *Among the Great* (American Edition), p. 221 where he also mentions, for the first time in public, what was the aim of his Yoga.

yet the very suffering, which is the offspring of ignorance, serves one, in the Divine enigmatic economy, as a goad to the search for a panacea to the evil of suffering, viz. pain and grief:

Thy grief is a cry of darkness to the Light;  
Pain was the first-born of the Inconscience  
Which was thy body's dumb original base.

And its *raison d'être* was that it fathered joy, since

...pain came first, then only joy could be,  
Pain ploughed the first hard ground of the world-  
drowse.

By pain a spirit started from the clod,  
By pain Life stirred in the subliminal deep.

And therefore

It drew its shapes from the subconscious depths,  
Then turned to look upon the world it had made.

Not only that, pain—with its polar opposite, joy—was a necessary goad to our soul to wake up and look:

By pain and joy, the bright and tenebrous twins,  
The inanimate world perceived its sentient soul.

And the soul's slow and progressive awakening out of the circumambient "world-drowse" (in which it has, naturally,

to participate, being itself a part of the world) is, in its turn, necessary because otherwise it can never shed its native clinging to this lethargy of sleep and therefore never initiate any change first in itself and secondly in the Inconscient which is the origin of the primal Inertia and the perpetuator of the *status quo*. To remedy this, the psychic being in each of us must first recapture its lost poise and so come to its own because

Else had the Inconscient never suffered change.

But the Inconscient is the citadel of Matter, and Matter, having a greater longevity than the most unageing die-hard, is a born imperialist vis-à-vis the future. So it cannot be prevailed upon to welcome change. That is why pain has to take a hand as the liberator because, in the last analysis,

Pain is the hammer of the gods to break  
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,  
His slow inertia as of living stone.  
If the heart were not forced to want and weep,  
His soul would have lain down content, at ease,  
And never thought to exceed the human start.

Nietzsche caught something of the Divine Resolve, amounting to a predetermination, when he said: "Der Mensch ist Etwas das überwunden werden soll."<sup>1</sup> But, as

<sup>1</sup> Man is something that has to be transcended.

Sri Aurobindo points out, this ultimate self-transcendence cannot be achieved if man unwarily sides with the power-addict Demon (Asura) in himself to the exclusion of the love-inebriate God—so Narad, the protagonist of the Divine Gnosis, counsels Aswapati, the Vicegerent of the Divine Aspiration:

O mortal, bear this great world's law of pain,  
In thy hard passage through a suffering world  
Lean for thy soul's support on Heaven's strength,  
Turn towards high Truth, aspire to love and peace!

But he warns him, withal, against admitting a wrong movement in his impatient exploration of a short cut:

Haste not towards Godhead on a dangerous road,  
Open not thy doorways to a nameless Power,  
Climb not to Godhead by the Titan's road.

Because the deluded Titan is motivated not by the spirit of God-allegiance but by God-defiance and therefore

Heavenward he clambers on a stair of storms.....  
He strives with a giant strength to wrest by force  
From life and Nature the immortals' right,

because having grown blind in his lust for quick results,

He waits not for the outstretched hand of God  
To raise him out of his mortality.



In the Gita we find a description of the salient features of the *Asura's* character. But Sri Aurobindo's description gives us a much fuller view (because the modern *Asura*, even as the modern human has become a much more complex being):

A monopolist of the world-energy,  
 He dominates the life of common men.  
 His pain and others' pain he makes his means:  
 On death and suffering he makes his throne.  
 In the hurry and clangour of his acts of might,  
 In a riot and excess of fame and shame,  
 By his magnitudes of hate and violence,  
 By the quaking of the world beneath his tread  
 He matches himself against the Eternal's calm  
 And feels in himself the greatness of a god:  
 Power in his image of celestial self.

And therefore he grows and grows in stature till—by the inescapable law of Karma, as the Gita puts it—he identifies himself with the Colossus, Selfhood, the Image of his adoration, *yo yachchhraddhah sa eva sah*.<sup>1</sup> That this is not a fanciful nightmare must become obvious to anyone who will look at what is happening in the world around us, in and through every power-addict Dictator who inflates himself into a colossal Demon of the vital, a veritable Titan of whom Sri Aurobindo says:

<sup>1</sup> A man grows into what he worships

The Titan's heart is a sea of fire and force:  
He exults in the death of things and ruin and fall;  
He feeds his strength with his own and others' pain;  
In the world's pathos and passion he takes delight,  
His pride, his might call for the struggle and pang.  
He glories in the sufferings of the flesh  
And covers the stigmata with the Stoic's name.

This is not an overdrawn picture; nor has one to be a mystic or a Yogi to be able to see that this has been one of the primeval causes of human misery. Any dispassionate observer will have to agree here with Sri Aurobindo. To give an instance, I shall quote a passage from the great realist-idealist Lowes Dickenson's *Justice and Liberty*:

"Nietzsche's strong man is not a mere ideal; he is a fact ....For it is Power, not wealth or comfort, at which they aim; and in pursuit of that aim they trample under foot all law and all morality....Power being their ideal, they are most conscious of having achieved it when the resistance over which they triumphed has been most vigorous; and what provokes resistance more determined than the prospect of *spoliation*, ruin and death? The more, therefore, the victims suffer, the more the 'Overman' rejoices, for the more conscious he is of being strong; and in that sense of strength lies his whole satisfaction in life."

Nietzsche's Overman is synonymous with Russell's Dictator, Sri Aurobindo's Titan and Sri Krishna's Asura. In other words, though each of these has a different outlook

on the world, they all diagnose for us the same type of evil and its dreadful tendency. Studying this type we realise that the time-old lust in humanity for dominating others is as difficult to eradicate from human nature as it is deleterious to the nature itself. When I first came to the Ashram, I well remember how I walked its grounds with jaunty steps with this complacent idea that I was, with all my faults and failings, a good man. I saw certain wrong movements in me—happily, more blemishes in others—but though I wanted sincerely to get rid of them, I never thought that their expulsion was a matter of any immediate urgency. I had certain blissful experiences to turn to from time to time; also some delightful musical or poetical achievements which only buttressed my general self-complacency that all was well with me here below even as with God on high; and last, though not least, very heartening encouragements from Gurudev and the Mother that in spite of my stumblings and depressions I *was* getting on. Is it any wonder that I should be utterly unconscious of the bloated power-addict that slept within my “innocent and humble self” as I called the being popularly known as Dilip? In one word, I was far from surmising that I had such a tremendous leeway to make up or, to put it in the Yogic terminology, that I would have to “transform my nature” step by step, resolutely, ploddingly, ruthlessly and lastly, alas, despondently because it was going to be such an uphill task. I was yet to be put wise to the difficulties of Yoga or, rather, to the hurdles the Yogis had to cross in the past. The actual difficulties which I

had to encounter in my day to day *sadhana* of the Ashram life turned out to be very different indeed from those I had imagined and been forewarned against by the worldly-wise. When I came to the Ashram in my exalted mood I thought that I would only have, in the first place, to undergo heroic austerities and, in the second, to meditate for hours and hours. The first prospect goaded the egoist in me to become even more alive if not kicking, while the second made me simply glow with pride as I said to myself with the great poet A.E.:

We are in our distant hope  
One with all the great and wise:  
Comrade, do not turn and grope  
For a lesser light that dies.

Yes, I echoed him readily again and again:

Pure at heart we wander now,  
We have hopes beyond today  
And our quest does not allow  
Rest or dreams along the way.

The first fly that I discovered in the ointment of my self-esteem was when I found that I did not like it at all whenever any of those who used to obey my will declined to bow down to my wisdom in which I lived and moved and grew progressively: my growing wisdom made my egoism grow too. I had thought that it must work the other way: that



my egoism should dwindle in proportion as my Yogic wisdom and insight deepened. This, naturally, disconcerted me but that in itself would not have been so serious had I not noted at the same time that my discomfiture was often enough attended with a secret chafing at the Guru's will having his way as against mine. This is not an autobiography, so I cannot possibly enlarge on such experiences. Suffice it to say therefore that I came to realise slowly but inescapably that the Asura of whom I had heard so much was not a mythical figure with a multitude of heads and hands but a real resident and cherished guest housed only too willingly by each of us. Only some cherished him more, some less, that is all. I saw, for instance, that whenever any vital hunger in me was underfed, he got progressively restive till even the social trappings of decency became hard to retain to cover his naked ugliness. Years later I read a citation from the great mystic William Law the purport of which is that none can turn towards God without turning his back upon his ego, because none can be fully alive to God till he completely die to his lower nature.

But I must pause here a little to stress an experience of mine which grew from day to day till I could not deny its vivid, concrete reality. I refer to what Gurudev called the "hostile forces". I had, indeed, read about the Buddha's *Mara*, heard about the Christian Devil and speculated in my fanciful way about ghosts and spirits and monsters which figured in the Tantric writings of certain schools. But having always been exceedingly normal and strong with no "weird experiences" to vaunt (much though I

longed to) I could never take such disembodied entities seriously. What I mean is that though I did not exactly pooh-pooh all such stories as old wives' tales, I never imagined that there could really be in action queer forces such as these wherewith a twentieth-century spiritual seeker might have to reckon in dull earnest on his way to the Divine.

I never saw any spirits not to mention the Devil, though I agreed always with Russell's acceptance of Him as a living reality. Nor did I ever feel any eerie presences (Paul Valérie called these "*les choses absentes*") which left me an aftermath of jittery fears. I did indeed hear from my friends about such macabre things which loomed and waylaid good Samaritans. Also I came to witness quite a few sudden unaccountable happenings which terrified the percipients, sometimes even disabled them temporarily. But for all that, I could never persuade myself that these might ever be concrete impediments on *my* way, far less make *my* mind "go off its handle" as I put it flippantly.

Nevertheless—and here is my point—I had to take cognizance time and again—not indeed of their actual presences, but of the heritage of diffidence and depression they bequeathed, a legacy too heavy to be dismissed nonchalantly. And, to make confusion worse confounded, they bred their microbes so fast that before I could pronounce "Alert Armstrong" they would have me "translated like Bottom" from a rational optimist into a ne'er-do-well. I know here I am unlikely to be convincing, the more because I cannot hope to *prove* my point to those who have not

experienced what I have. Notwithstanding, I must still testify to what I have felt again and again, namely, that we can never insulate ourselves completely from forces which encircle us except with the help of the powers which can as concretely shield us as others can attack. To give a typical instance:

I want something from Gurudev or Mother—some support in some matter. It so happens that neither comes forward to oblige me. My self-love gets hurt and then lo! the magic button is pressed and where it was all a laughing garden a moment ago with hopes dancing like flowers, certitudes glowing like sunbeams and aspirations soaring like birds, one sees only doubts blasting like poison-fumes, chafings irrational like thorns and last, though not least, a sentimental revolt that gesticulates like a demon deprived of his mask. Time and again did this happen to me and often enough, just when on the top of the weather, there out of a clear sky, a wrong suggestion dropped into me and then with a bang came the show-down. I know full well how difficult it is to bring home to others the concrete vividness of such experiences, the more because if and when they come to us in ordinary life, that is on non-yogic paths, the depressions do not assail as they do here—with the veritable downrush of a deluge or the storm-hurtle of an avalanche. The reason is that in ordinary life these hostile forces do not need to be as active or organised as they are in Yoga—their *métier* being to thwart all Godward endeavours, and in ordinary life people are seldom concentrated on such a task. But when the God-seeker wants to clamber or soar



upward, these phalanx themselves quickly in their rebel alarm to be able to act as a sort of earth-pull or wing-clipper, shall I say? Or, to give another simile, when you float with the tides, all the waves befriend you and carry you on their jubilant crests, but just turn back to swim against them and you will know swiftly what is what! This image seemed to me more apposite especially when I swam against the current and felt all but suffocated by the buffets of the waves. I was reminded of this when years later, a nonplussed pupil of mine, Indira, said that so long as she had not wanted the Divine the world had been very kind and officious and appreciative, but that it all changed radically the moment she turned to Yoga for God. I told her what I had realised years ago, that it *had* to be always more or less like that.

"*Had* to be? Why?" she asked, still at sea.

"Because", I answered after I had recounted to her briefly what I myself had gone through, "Yoga means transcending *Prakriti* or the forces of Nature, which flow all around us like the waves. So long as you are in the swim, acquiescing in these, you will be automatically upheld and carried forward by them. But since the Yoga wants to sunder you from them they, very naturally, resent your defection and outlaw you as a deserter. You can't expect the services of those you don't propose to oblige by offering concessions. And when, moreover, you want to expel them out of your very being which has been their habitat for years and years, won't they get furious and attack from sheer fear of becoming homeless refugees?"



This in itself would not have been so cataclysmic, if I may exploit such a purple word, had not these forces of Nature found the too-willing support of the hostile forces which are sworn to oppose God-seekers everywhere. That is why all spiritual guides have emphasised the urgent need of purifying our emotions so that we may, at every cross-road, side always with the right ones as against the wrong. To put it succinctly, we must not allow these adverse forces any loophole or handle by sympathising with what we are, alas, too apt to call natural. This may sound easy in theory but it is quite an uphill task in practice, as I found to my bitter cost, and the more I realised this the more grateful I felt towards Gurudev for his unfailing help and guidance showing me, indefatigably, where and how I had swerved from the right attitude as a result of which these forces could creep in imperceptibly through the breaches made thereby. It was primarily his insistence on the right attitude which helped me evict the wrong ones in spite of their masterly pleadings for what we call our *human* ways and *natural* reactions.

But this is known to all Yogis. I have no wish to write a manual of Yoga. I have referred to this only to underline, first, the help and encouragement Gurudev always gave us whenever we erred or slipped; secondly, the security of protection he extended to us whenever we felt depressed or diffident; and lastly, the invaluable guidance he gave us by acting as an eye-opener to us all, showing laboriously the cause of the minutest of our backslidings. None who has not been through such ordeals can ever fully appraise

the concrete help that comes along with the guiding voice of the Pilot. Indeed, the feeling of reassurance, *abhoy*, cannot be described—it has to be experienced: but a sample of the nature of the guidance he gave on such occasions I may adduce here which will explain itself. After one such attack he wrote to me:

“The hostile forces exist and have been known to yogic experience ever since the days of the Vedas and Zoroaster in Asia (and the mysteries of Egypt and Cabbala) and in Europe also from old times. These things of course cannot be felt or known so long as one lives in the ordinary mind and its ideas and perceptions; for these there are only two categories of influences recognisable: the ideas and feelings and actions of oneself and others and the play of environment and physical forces; but once one begins to get the inner view of things, it is different. One begins to experience that all is an action of forces of *Prakriti*, psychological as well as physical which play upon our nature and these are conscious forces or are supported by a consciousness or consciousnesses behind. One is in the midst of a big universal working and it is impossible any longer to explain everything as the result of one's own and sole personality. You yourself have at one time written that your crises of despair etc. came upon you as if thrown on you and worked themselves out without your being able to determine or put an end to them. That means an action of universal forces and not merely an independent action of your personality though it is something in your nature of which they make use. But you are not conscious, and

others also, of this intervention and pressure as its source for the reason I state. Those in the Ashram who have developed the inner view of things on the vital plane have plenty of experience of the hostile forces. However, you need not personally concern yourself with them so long as they remain incognito....One may have the experiences on the mental plane without this knowledge coming—for there mind and idea predominate and one does not feel the play of Forces—it is only in the vital that this becomes clear. In the mind plane they manifest at most as mental suggestions and not as concrete powers. Also if one looks at things with the mind only (even though it be the inner mind) one may see the subtle play of Nature-forces but without recognising the conscious intention which we call hostile.”

But Knowledge too has its disadvantages—as I was to discover soon enough—especially when it leads one to glimpse the world of occult forces, however fugitively. To give a typical instance, in my pre-yogic days, whenever I flirted with a wrong suggestion I never dreamt of its virus being cultured somewhere outside to be injected subsequently into my mind. But with the passage of time I did perceive a fissure in my own being: I could see, with progressive clarity, that what I had hitherto looked upon as an indivisible part of my personality was, in reality, a conglomerate of a variety of disparate influences. This generated in me a deep uneasiness: whither was I going? Why all this fuss in my own being about my own self—these rifts and interstices and what not? But the trouble



was that nothing I could do at the time seemed capable of undoing what had been done. It was as though—to use a simile contrariwise—a drop of curd had been thrown into a bowl of milk whereafter the disintegration of the milk could not be reversed. A ray of light had come to stay in my consciousness and it had thereafter to work as a leaven. The result—I could not recapture my unflawed self-assurance of the pre-yogic days that I was indeed what I took myself to be. This made me desolate as the new knowledge irretrievably had soured the sweet milk of self-complacency. I struggled in vain to have it restored. For do what I would, I simply could not revert to what I had been converted from. For instance, I could now see clearly that whenever I toyed with a wrong suggestion, some part of me was glad while another part was unhappy resenting it as an intrusion. What made me unhappier still was that I became more and more conscious, as days passed, of a wilful encouragement somewhere. But as this made me feel disloyal to my Guru, I tried in my clever(?) way to rationalise it into legitimacy. “Oh, keep an open mind, don’t you know,” a part of me said to myself coaxingly. “Don’t you invite blindness, my boy! Why must you accept everything you are told as gospel truth? Watch, weigh and sift all the time: never surrender your native inviolable right to be a judge of your own reactions. If an idea is burgeoning within you, do not show it the door in this off-hand manner because somebody commands you to. Remember that you have an inalienable right to your own ideas, you cannot possibly grow to your ultimate stature



without their friendly help. Everything that happens to you can give you a leg up, you know, provided you accept its aid in the right spirit. And, dash it all, your individuality is the most precious part of your integral self, isn't it? How can you then—you, a born lover of freedom—will yourself into blind slavery and have it liquidated? How can you possibly forget that the Divine has fashioned your individual ego to be harmonised into a distinctive flower—not to be squeezed out into an amorphous jelly. Ugh!"—and so on—endless variations on one theme: do not surrender your self-will.

As time marched past, I became progressively conscious of the fallacy of such specious reasoning till, in the end, I saw, like St. Augustine of yore, that it was not freedom I ached for but licence. I saw that my higher self was not willing but eager to surrender to Gurudev's will because it could well do without this so-called freedom to follow the ego's unruly cravings and subtle promptings. The trouble arose, as I grew to realise, because my lower nature did not want to toe the line—to waive its native right to its unlovely enjoyments.

But my lower nature, like Goldsmith's famous school-master, "though vanquished argued still" and so did its utmost to resist transformation till, at last, matters were brought to a head, and thus decided for me, by a horrible experience of a friend and co-disciple, P. He used to be, in those days, a neighbour of mine and as he did not know English very well, I used to write for him to Sri Aurobindo about his experiences. And he had had wonderful expe-

riences to his credit—seen marvellous visions, heard thrilling voices, savoured exquisite delights—in short, had already “drunk deep at the Pierian spring” of the Spirit. And yet his lower nature had known no change and would still drag him back to his old pleasure-haunts, as he used to tell me in those days with bitter regrets.<sup>1</sup> “I do want to come here and stay permanently”, he used to tell me off and on, “but alas, I cannot even stay here a couple of months at a stretch. I get restive and peaceless,” and so on. His long tale of woes staggered me as in those days I was still a raw novice in Yoga and had only just begun to step across the border of ordinary consciousness. So I could not account at all for his restlessness after the tremendous harvest he had reaped in the field of spiritual experiences till, on that unforgettable day, when he came running to me in the afternoon and told me, completely unnerved, what he had just visioned, with open eyes. He spoke, in Hindi mixed with Bengali:

“I was praying to Gurudev, you know,” he said, “for strength to be able to make a long stay here when I saw an ugly little brat of the colour of coal tar—a stinking, stunted manikin—come out of my body and beg before me: ‘Oh give me something. You have enough to live on but I am starving!’ And he fell at my feet crying, Dilip—just fancy that!! Oh, I shall never sleep again thinking of this nightmare!” And so he wailed on, in dire straits.

<sup>1</sup> He gave up these pleasures later on, a change which amounted, in his case, to a feat and so impressed all his friends including myself.

It was indeed hair-raising, as I wrote to Gurudev, who wrote back to P (I read out the letter to him) that the ugly little brat was an exteriorisation of his lower-vital being of lust and concupiscence and possessiveness. "Do you understand now," he wrote, "why you are not allowed to stay here? It is this formation of your life in the past. He wants food which is literally denied here. That is why you have to depart again and again. Your lower vital being is still too much alive and kicking to let you stay here and, till he changes, I fear this see-saw in your nature is likely to continue."

I quote the letter from memory but as P's account of the repulsive apparition left an indelible impression on my mind I am sure I have given that substance of Gurudev's letter to him correctly. But to come back to my own experience.

P's account of his lower self made such a dent on my mind that I resolved thenceforward to be drastic with my lower nature, even though being a born realist plus sceptic I knew that do what I would, the see-saw in my own being was unlikely to cease overnight. Nevertheless I had no intention of yielding to the appeals of my lower vital being in spite of the oscillations. I cannot claim that I never stumbled, but I do claim that I endeavoured to tighten the rein when my horse wanted to make for the ditch.

But the curious thing was that although I knew now that all such voices heard by me issued from the Under-world, yet the very fact that they found in me a sympa-

thiser still, caused me to doubt, in spite of myself, whether they could really be voices extraneous to my private world of self. Between them, Gurudev and P had indeed all but convinced me that strange invisible beings were ambushed all around us, ready to pounce on our weaknesses and make us their helpless puppets: nevertheless, could one, seriously take all such voices and visions at their face value? Was it not too outlandish, even grotesque that such alien voices should be able to trespass into my heart's privacy without my knowledge and despite my vigilance?

But to my sorrow, I found, as soon as I reviewed it in retrospect, that my personality had not one but many gates and as many masked gate-keepers, so that even when Vigilance, the chief porter was wide-awake at the main entrance, some other could and often did open the back-door. So it happened, again and again, that the hostile suggestion or impulse did get admitted in spite of my resolution to shut it out. To put it differently, the more I watched myself the more I was reminded of Pope's *Essay on Man*:

Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,  
Aspiring to be angels, men rebel.

And we do not merely rebel, but also refuse to learn from our past mistakes, insist on our right to plead for our folly with the wisest of reasonings and, lastly—to quote from Gurudev's letter to me—resist “the change



from the human to the divine consciousness" in order to be able to defend our "right to sorrow and suffering". I was reminded time and again of Sri Ramakrishna's simile about the camel which even when its mouth bled from munching "prickly grass" would persist in munching the same thorns and no other. In other words, I insisted, as Gurudev pointed out in a long letter, "on the Divine becoming human and remaining in the human consciousness" and withal protested "against any attempt to make the human divine".

And that is why this "bleeding piece of earth", human nature, has bled stanchlessly since the dawn of time and the soul of man has still to sigh over what his life remains, to this day:

"A seeker in a dark and obscure place,  
An ill-armed warrior facing dreadful odds,  
An imperfect worker given a baffling task,  
An ignorant judge of problems Ignorance made,  
Its heavenward flights reach closed and keyless gates,  
Its glorious outbursts peter out in mire."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book VI: The Book of Fate

## CHAPTER VIII

### GURU, THE TRANSFORMER

As this realisation deepened not merely in abstract, impeccable theory, but in hard, stark reality, I felt more and more aghast at my own lower nature till, in my darkest crises, I decided again and again that I could not possibly be declared eligible by the One who had, I complained, unreasonably dragged me to such a path. But then why had he, I asked Gurudev, since He at least had known all along how unfit I was though I myself did not—naturally, being ignorant of the very stuff and basis of my nature! I bitterly complained at such moments and the more restive I grew, the more convinced I became that I was unfit for Yoga and therefore should leave instantly.

But there they were, Mother and Gurudev with the balm of their encouragement and the assurance of their forgiveness.

“You need not think that anything can alter our attitude towards you”, Gurudev wrote on one such occasion. “That which is extended to you is not a vital human love which can be altered by external things: it remains and persistently we shall try to help you up and lead you towards the Light where in the union of the soul and the heart you will recognise the Friend and the Mother.”

On another occasion I wrote to him that I was daily realising anew the difficulty of changing my lower nature, which must have been the reason of my obstinate gloom. I sent him a poem praying that it might be given to me to see his love as divine in its texture.

"I only see", I wrote in the end, "that it is not quite human in the sense that it is stationed beyond the 'sphere of our sorrow' though perhaps purer for that very reason."

As I wrote this, it recurred to me that, unlike some ascetics, he did not want to stay remote from the earth. So I wrote again "I confess I cannot quite see you felicitating yourself on having achieved such a purity at the price you have paid, and yet I cannot deny that you are too far away from our ailing earth to be regarded as a kinsman to us, realist earthlings. What, however, baffles me still more is that you should go on representing Heaven as a neighbour of earth. For do you not assert, tirelessly, that not only can the love divine be grafted on this our undivine earth but be made to grow native to its soil? I find that beyond our human comprehension since this Divine Love of yours only looks like something to swear by and not something to lean on. But as I do not claim that my findings are right, I shall wait till I have some 'clarification' on this point, to use a political word in a spiritual context, which, I trust, will be deemed pardonable. Also I send you a poem in which I have tried to show a better side to my nature. I wonder if it will sound convincing since it expresses something which runs counter to my present mood of pessimism. But then may I defend myself

that my poems express something more than my present moods in that they voice an aspiration though it may sound alien to these moods? My aspiration here—or shall I say prayer?—is for strength and will to strength, that it may be given to me to plod on when the shadows fall. For one can be optimistic enough while the going is easy, but it is only when the darkness holds you in its relentless thrall that your faith in and loyalty to the Light is really tested—*comme il faut*—when one passes through a desert or wilderness”.

To that he wrote back:

“I objected in a former letter not to aspiration but to a demand to make peace or joy or Ananda a condition for following the Yoga. And it is undesirable because if you do so then the vital takes the lead and then unrest, despondency, unhappiness can always come, since these things are the very nature of the vital—the vital can never remain constantly in joy and peace, for it needs their opposites in order to have the sense of the drama of life. And yet when unrest and unhappiness come, the vital at once cries: ‘I am not given my due, what is the use of my doing Yoga?’ Or else, it makes a gospel of its unhappiness and says that the path to fulfilment must be a tragic road through the desert. And yet, it is precisely this preponderance of the vital in us that makes the necessity of passing through the desert. If the psychic were always there in the front, the desert would be no longer a desert and the wilderness would blossom with roses.” And he went on to add:



"I think the best thing I can write to you in the circumstances is to recommend to you Nolini's aphorism, 'Depression need not be depressing; rather it should be made a jumping-board for the leap to a higher poise'. The rule in Yoga is not to let the depression depress you, to stand back from it, observe its cause and remove the cause; for the cause is always in oneself, perhaps a vital defect somewhere, a wrong movement indulged or a petty desire causing a recoil, sometimes by its satisfaction, sometimes by its disappointment.

"If the Mother and I want you to progress and to accept the divine love we give you, it is for your own sake and precisely because in that love there is constant peace and joy and adoration and causeless sorrow of this kind will disappear altogether. Our love is there for you and has always been there. I cannot believe that you will reject it. For God's sake throw aside these misunderstandings and these movements, recover your true self and face out firmly, with the Mother's help and mine, the difficulties of the Yoga.

"Your poem entitled 'In Darkness' is a very moving one, delicate, true and beautiful in every line."

On another occasion, however, I was not so brave, when I discovered, to my utter humiliation, that it was not that I could not change but that I would not. "This," I wrote to him, "makes me feel convinced that I am a misfit here, that I am, as Tagore said to me once, an artist first and last—not a Yogi. But the trouble is, Guru, that though I loved art passionately once upon a time, I failed to find

it completely absorbing. Besides, I believed sincerely that if I wanted the Divine He would make it possible for me to climb up to him however hard and steep the path: in other words, he would make me change. But I don't find that He is at all responsive or that He would even have me persevere here. So perhaps it would be wiser for me to leave such a hopeless endeavour and try something more practicable if not equally satisfying. But then I don't find the conditions around very satisfying either; so why not permit me to try something else—say courting prison patriotically as Subhas and Jawaharlal are doing? For you must admit at least that I am not very receptive to your helping Force, which shows (does it not?) that I am essentially unfit for your Yoga which aims at making us non-human?

"Besides", I wrote in a sudden revulsion from self-pity (to turn once more to the old die-hard, Mr. Ego!) "you will have to concede, Guru, that I did not come here an utter failure, frustrated by life, a useless floatsam, stranded by tides of circumstances on the shoals of your Yoga. I was wanted by a great many, admired by a good many and am wanted still by so many. I had money, gifts, health and a social standing and then I could have founded a Musical Academy and developed my own new style of music and and flowered into a poet too—not altogether a wretched life you will admit—" and so I ranted on in my impetuous folly and concluded thus: "Why then did your Supramental Divine uproot me from my native soil if He wanted only to disqualify me finally as a Yogi?" But he did not

give me a rating or pull me down to pieces. He descended to my level and answered my charges one by one with the deep understanding and superhuman patience of which he alone was capable.

"Dilip," he wrote, "even if things were as bad as you say, I don't see how going away would help you in the least—(it would certainly not make you non-human): some have tried before—this device of progress by departure but it has never succeeded, they have had to come back and face their difficulty. Your other suggestion (of courting prison patriotically) is even more irrational: what you propose would not happen and the only result would be hard labour or detention which would be both unpleasant and unprofitable to you and useless to the country. Why do you always come back to this notion of going away or entertain it at all? It is quite meaningless from any rational point of view; it only encourages the adverse Forces which want to take you away from the path, to return to the attack, and it prevents the speedy conversion of that dissatisfied part of your vital which is always kicking against the pricks—the pricks of your soul and of your spiritual destiny. However sad the prospect may seem to this dissatisfied vital fragment, *your destiny is to be a Yogi* and the sooner it reconciles itself to the prospect the better for it and for all the other personalities in you. Your alleged or inferred unfitness is a delusion, an imagination of the vital part; it doesn't exist. If persistence of difficulties be a proof of unfitness, then there is nobody in this Ashram who is fit for the Yoga. We would all have to pack up our



belongings or give them away and start either to get back to the ordinary world or en route for the Himalayas.

"You describe the rich human egoistic life you might have lived and you say 'not altogether a wretched life, you will admit'. On paper it sounds even very glowing and satisfactory, as you describe it. But there is no real or final satisfaction in it, except for those who are too common or trivial to seek anything else, and even they are not really satisfied or happy and, in the end, it tires and palls. Sorrow and illness, clash and strife, disappointment, disillusionment and all kinds of human suffering come and beat its glow to pieces and then decay and death. That is the vital egoistic life as man has found it throughout the ages, and yet is it that which this part of your vital regrets? How do you fail to see, when you lay so much stress on the desirability of a merely human consciousness, that suffering is its badge? When the vital resists the change from the human into the divine consciousness, what it is defending is its right to sorrow and suffering and all the rest of it, varied and relieved no doubt by some vital and mental pleasures and satisfactions, but very partially relieved by them and only for a time. In your own case, it was already beginning to pall on you and that was why you turned from it. No doubt, there were the joys of the intellect and of artistic creation, but a man cannot be an artist alone; there is the outer, quite human, lower vital part and, in all but a few, it is the most clamorous and insistent part. But what was dissatisfied in you? It was the soul within, first of all, and through it the higher



mind and the higher vital. Why then find fault with the Divine for misleading you when it turned you to the Yoga or brought you here? It was simply answering to the demand of your inner being and the higher parts of your nature. If you have so much difficulty and become restless, it is because you are still divided and something in your lower vital still regrets what it has lost, or, as a price for its adhesion or a compensation—price to be *immediately* paid down to it—asks for something similar and equivalent in the spiritual life. It refuses to believe that there is a greater compensation, a larger vital life waiting for it, something positive in which there shall not be the old inadequacy and unrest and final dissatisfaction. The foolishness is not in the Divine guidance, but in the irrational and obstinate resistance of this confused and obscure part of you to the demand, made not only by this Yoga, but by all Yogas—to the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of your aspiration of your own soul and higher nature.”

Then after giving a summary review of the past Yogas which would be too long to quote he pointed out the foolish inconsistencies of the human vital and wrote: “I know that this is the natural inconsistency of the human vital mind wanting two incompatible things together; but that is why it is necessary to transform the human and put something a little more luminous in its place.”<sup>1</sup>

I must pause here and point out that during those early

<sup>1</sup> The entire letter has been published in *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* 2nd series in Section XI, entitled “Difficulties of Transformation”.

years of our *sadhana* we often expressed our misgivings about his "thesis of the Supramental", as we called it. I often wrote to him (half in jest, no doubt, but the other half clung impenitently to its scepticism) that the Supramental seemed too good to be true. Once I wrote to him what Chadwick remarked casually about the Supramental: "Sri Aurobindo takes one's breath away, Dilip! Will it, can it, really happen?" I often conveyed to Gurudev such titbits to draw him out if I could and, as I generally succeeded, I grew bolder and went the length of equating the Supramental with something grim and withering like a ruthless Dictator out to do good but with a devastating velocity, riding roughshod over all our cherished ideals of a sweet and liberal living and perhaps making us despise this beautiful earth as an utterly unsuitable place for its Kingdom of thunder and lightning.

He must have smiled indulgently when he commented on my flings and, coming down to my level once again, ran full tilt into me:

"It is curious that you admit your ignorance of what the Supramental can be, and yet in these moods you not only pronounce categorically what it is like, but reject emphatically my experience about it as of no practical validity or not valid for anybody but myself! I have not insisted, I have answered only casually because I am not asking you now to be non-human and divine much less to be supramental; but as you are always returning to this point when you have these attacks and making it the pivot—or at least a main support—of your depression, I am

obliged to answer. The Supramental is not grand, aloof, cold and austere; it is not something opposed to or inconsistent with a full vital and physical manifestation; on the contrary, it carries in it the only possibility of the full fullness of the vital force and the physical life on earth. It is because it is so, *because it was so revealed to me and for no other reason that I have followed after it and persevered till I came into contact with it and was able to draw down some power of it and its influence.* I am concerned with the earth and not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other Yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental Yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object. The Supramental is simply the Truth-Consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter. One has indeed to rise to high summits to reach it, but the more one rises, the more can one bring down below. No doubt, life and body have not to remain the ignorant, imperfect, impotent things they are now; but why should a change to a fuller life-power, a fuller body-power be considered something aloof, cold and undesirable? The utmost *ananda* the body and life are now capable of is a brief excitement of the vital mind or the nerves or the cells which is limited, imperfect and soon passes; with the supramental change all the cells, nerves, vital forces, embodied mental forces can become filled with a thousand-



fold *ananda*, capable of an intensity of bliss which passes description and which need not fade away. How aloof, repellent and undesirable! The Supramental love means an intense unity of soul with soul, mind with mind, life with life, and an entire flooding of the body-consciousness with the physical experience of oneness, the presence of the Beloved in every part, in every cell of the body. Is that too something aloof and grand and undesirable? With the supramental change, the very thing on which you insist, the possibility of the free physical meeting of the embodied Divine with the *sadhaka* without conflict of forces and without undesirable reactions becomes possible, assured and free. That too is, I suppose, something aloof and undesirable? I could go on—for pages, but this is enough for the moment."

Which brings me right into the heart of the problem of transformation of our nature into what it aspires to be and yet refuses to accept when it has, perforce, to put its shoulder to the wheel! It acts in this anomalous way because it is driven by diverse forces warring in its own territory for mastery, because it has, in a word, wheels within wheels. But here I will have to revert to my past to be intelligible—the more as I myself found it not a little difficult to understand what was expected of us as well as what they, our guides, were up against in their *sadhana*.

When one puts it in words simply, as an abstract thesis, it sounds indeed feasible and laudable enough to be attempted. Has it not been claimed by all the great seers,



mystics and prophets down the ages that our intellect can be a help only if it agrees to serve the spirit—that it is a good orderly but a bad commandant? Or to put it in the deeper accent of the great Seer:

The intellect is not all; a guide within  
Awaits our question; He it was informed  
The reason, He surpasses; and unformed  
Presages of His mightiness begin.<sup>1</sup>

True Yogis have unanimously claimed, however, that these “presages” cannot become clear messages—far less helping torches which slay the darkness that makes us grope so pitifully on our way—unless and until either the mind is stilled or reason taught its place in the scheme of things. I had once an interesting talk with the saint, Sri Ramdas, in his Ashram. He related to me the following incident:

He was then living on the top of a hill, in a small hut when, one evening, an intellectual friend sought him out. He had a great many questions seething in his mind, he said, to which he could find no satisfactory answers. Ramdas was scared stiff since he had never been overfond of the mentality which loves to cross-examine from the dais witnesses who stand in the dock deposing for the Divine. So he put off the discussion somehow and retired for the night. But as the ghost had only been warded off

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Sri Aurobindo's poem “In the Moonlight”.

for the nonce, not laid, he had to appeal to his one Extricator, Ram. To his amazement, in the dead of night Ram Himself formulated questions and answered them back, point by point, of which he kept a record. Next morning he showed these to his intellectual friend who found it all but incredible: the very questions he wanted to ask had been answered by Ram, the questions which he had not even hinted at to Ramdas.

These questions, with the answers, are given by Ramdas in his book, *At the Feet of God*. I shall only select a few from the sheaf:

Question: What is the result of self-surrender?

Answer: Everlasting bliss.

Question: How?

Answer: When the human will is given up for the Divine Will, all the responsibility of the instrument, the devotee, ceases and the consciousness of the individual ego is merged in the Divine consciousness. Then all his actions, thoughts and words emanate from the Divine source, leaving him entirely free from all doubts, desires and bonds.....

Question: How is it you allow your child's mind to wander?

Answer: All, all is myself, O child! Wherever your mind wanders, it wanders in me and rests in me....You cannot reason why it is so; but it is the one great Truth. You cannot comprehend it, but you can realise it.

Question: Why should Ramdas not comprehend it?

Answer: Because it is a thing beyond the range of the intellect.

Question: Then explain, why should there be an intellect at all and what are its functions?

Answer: The intellect exists only to help you know that you do not know anything.

I have intentionally laboured this point as I found myself very reluctant to accept in practice, if not in theory, the mystic's position that the intellect could help us best by exposing its untenable pretensions. My own upbringing had been—as that of most of my “educated friends” as I called them—an intellectual one, in the main. I do not mean that I could go with them all along the line or even that I grew up, like them, under the aegis of just one human faculty, intellect, and no other. (I would never have turned to Yoga had I regarded the mind as an infallible guide to the ultimate wisdom). But I do mean that I had come to accept that *reason had, in the last resort, the right to judge of the validity or otherwise of what we call things of the spirit*. Sri Aurobindo, in unison with the other great gnostics, repudiated this claim out of hand, which made me suffer in practice even though I had from the start acquiesced, in theory, in their nonconformist aloofness from the Church of the Intellect. I did not fully understand why I made such a to-do when I had to translate in practice what I had admitted so willingly in theory, till one day, when I asked Mother, she told me with her smile of sympathy, that those who live in the intellect cherish their intellectual preconceptions as they cherish their limbs, so that a blow on their darling ideas about right and wrong makes them literally wince as a blow on

the body. The mystery then became clear to me, in a flash; but even then I did not find her prescription as acceptable as her diagnosis. Time and again did I resolve, for instance, not to cotton too warmly to an idea. I told myself peremptorily that I was vowed to jettison the dead loads of such false ballasts, but in vain: whenever it came to the pinch, I felt a pang and my heart bled at the thought that I would have to part company with my intellectual ideas even when I knew they were not helpful beacons but phantom glimmers. At such times I used to be steeped in gloom and there flashed my old monitor doubt and, keen as a spear, stabbed me with reproach for having forced its dear Lord, Mind, to pay such an exorbitant tax to idolatry. I wrote to Gurudev innumerable letters asking him how to wheedle this sceptic into believing when it only ached to probe, weigh and, lastly, hold suspect everything that defied its scrutiny. He wrote a long letter<sup>1</sup> on doubt in which he opened his indictment of doubt with:

"I have started writing about doubt, but even in doing so I am afflicted by the 'doubt' whether any amount of writing or of anything else can persuade the external doubt in man which is the penalty of his native ignorance. In the first place, to write adequately would mean anything from sixty to six hundred pages, but not even six thousand pages would convince Doubt."

But the long letter gave me at best a consolation, not

<sup>1</sup> Published in full in the author's *Among the Great* (American edition pp. 245-250).



comfort and the prospect appeared far from cheering, for even he seemed to leave it at what amounted, in the last analysis, to an exhortation to change. I must indeed change, I agreed sadly, and throw clean overboard the compass of the intellect. His stinging sarcasm at the end of his letter hit the target:

"I would ask one simple question of those who would make the intellectual mind the standard and judge of spiritual experience. Is the Divine something less than Mind or is He something greater? Is mental consciousness with its groping enquiry, endless argument, unquenchable doubt, stiff and unplastic logic something superior or even equal to the Divine Consciousness or is it something inferior in its action and status? If it is greater, then there is no reason to seek after the Divine. If it is equal, then spiritual experience is quite superfluous. But if it is inferior, how can it challenge, judge, make the Divine stand as an accused or a witness before its tribunal, summon it to appear as a candidate for admission before a Board of Examiners or pin it down like an insect under its examining microscope?"

I have said that his exhortation only gave me consolation, not comfort because although I could honestly say that I had accepted from the start the mystic's position that the Divine was not to be sounded with the mental plummet, I could not say, with an equal honesty, that till a superior plummet came within my reach, I would gladly do without what equipment I had. I had indeed found our mental ideas and intellectual conceptions to be inadequate direction-

posts in that they did not lead their votaries out of the wood. But had I not also expected that I would have such apocalyptic visions of Truth as would make their little lights pale into insignificance? But alas, this did not happen in the spectacular manner I had imagined! The result: I moped and brooded, asked and doubted, complained and whimpered till at last I arraigned the Divine for not playing the game, for leaving me, in fact, in a worse lurch than his predecessor, Intellect, the false prophet, and therefore the only remedy left to Dilip was to blame the whole thing on the Guru.

I have put it somewhat crudely, but I do not think I have drawn a false picture of the quandary in which we—or at least a good many of us—found ourselves.

But of course this was by no means the whole story. If it were, it would not be worth the ink it is written with. On the positive side we gained a good deal not only in terms of joy and peace and day-to-day assurance that we were being cared for by and through the Guides we had accepted, but also in terms of those imponderable and yet concretely assessable dividends of faith and strength out of the investment of even our somewhat crude obedience and inchoate loyalty. How crude and unsatisfactory was our self-giving we came to realise more and more as days passed, and the shock this gave us can only be experienced, never described. But one feature of this gradual realisation I may well refer to, as a spokesman again of the rest, to wit, that even when in my moments of depression I underrated the spiritual value of the dividends that accrued to us, I became pro

gressively conscious of the utter inadequacy of my total investments. What was it after all that I had invested, I came to ask myself in my sober moments. A will undermined with vacillations; a faith riddled with doubts; a pledge to obedience with all sorts of safety valves to let out the fumes of reluctance; an undertaking of loyalty so flawed as to desert its post again and again even though there was little hope of relief in the offing—and lastly, a love that bargained all along and balked at surrender of its self-will knowing full well—to quote A.E.’s memorable lines—that

We must rise or we must fall,  
Love can know no middle way:  
If the great life do not call  
There is sadness and decay.

Yet, how often have I looked before and after and “fled from the boons of infinity as though I feared them”!<sup>1</sup>

I do not of course want to convey that here there was no difference between one *sadhaka* and another. For although I confess I was constitutionally incapable of aligning myself with those who would take everything on trust, I could not doubt but that there were among us a good many whose attitude was more balanced, whose faith better grounded and insight into Yogic happenings appreciably deeper than

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Mother’s *Prayers and Meditations* in which she says “To turn towards Thee, live in Thee and for Thee...is to breathe infinity....” And yet “Why do men flee from those boons, as though they feared them?”



mine. I was indeed critical but not purblind or unfair, and so was profoundly impressed by many an individual instance of admirable loyalty, sincerity, truthfulness, candour and above all, hard ungrudging work undertaken with the sole purpose of pleasing our Gurus. I could see that they had accepted such dull routine of unremitting work as earnest novitiates in the *nishkama karma* of the Gita. Years later, when Sri Krishnaprem visited our Ashram, he was profoundly impressed by the practical shape given to the ideal of "work as worship" as well as by the willingness with which our *sadhakas* generally accepted the work allotted to them even when the same round of dull hard work through wheeling years could hardly continue to afford them any real pleasure. "I know you will not want me to write of what are called impressions," he wrote to the Mother, "but I cannot refrain from mentioning the feeling that rose in me when I heard a *sadhaka*, who had come to Dilip's room, introduced quite simply as a son of the Mother."

And last, though by no means the least, I must stress here one thing which I fear outsiders often lose sight of when they pronounce adverse judgments on our *sadhana*. For though I must admit, with humble remorse, that many of us, including myself, did not fulfil even some of the major conditions without which no real transformation of our nature might begin, I cannot admit the right of anyone to pronounce on the fitness or unfitness of us individually or collectively until he has actually faced up to what we were struggling against. Tagore once said to me: "Scientists, technicians, philosophers and skilled workers of various



vocations, Dilip, are more fortunate than us, artists, in that Messrs. Everybody and Know-all will not dare brand their work off-hand with stigma; but just look, how quick they are in deciding whether our works of art are to be passed or damned." Years later, when I met him, I reminded him of his remark and added: "But sir, you ought to have classed us, Yogis too, with you."

He understood and smiled.

"But then," he said, "they don't see *your sadhana* as they see *ours*. So how can they judge?"

"By dismissing out of hand what they don't see as non-existent".

And how he laughed!

But I did not say this in mere jest. For I have seen the critics actually pontificating volubly about what we were doing and what we were leaving undone. I will give just one instance.

An English friend of mine came to visit me: a writer. He did not belong to that blatant type which, as Aldous Huxley puts it, comes to India first, to air his superiority and lastly, to have a good time. My friend was, in his own way, a thoughtful man and had a certain respect for India's wisdom. But although not quite self-complacent by nature, he had come to take it for granted that the Western outlook on life was both healthier and sounder than that of "the Oriental quietists", as he dubbed us, superiorly. I took him round the Ashram and he appreciated much of what he saw. Nevertheless he was fully persuaded that we had no wish to "act on life". "And how on

earth then is life in the world going to be changed?" he asked me, with something like a challenge in his voice.

I made what reply I could to deprecate his imputation that we were just a society of "earth-averse quietists", but in vain. Neither did I see how I was to bring home to his somewhat rigid mind the fact that much of his criticism could not be valid for the simple reason that he did not realise what we were up against: the inertia of the ego harnessed to the rebelliousness of our self-will. Still I endeavoured to explain to him, as best I could, why I had to repudiate the call of the world of clamorous and personal ambition. I quoted for his benefit a message of Gurudev's: "The liberated man has no personal hopes; he does not seize on things as his personal possessions; he receives what the Divine Will brings him, covets nothing, is jealous of none; what comes to him he takes without repulsion and without attachment; what goes from him he allows to depart into the whirl of things without repining or grief or sense of loss. His heart and self are under perfect control; they are free from reaction and passion, they make no turbulent response to the touches of outward things." But neither my ardour nor my arguments availed: he proved quite opaque. In fact he did remind me of Madame de Staël who, to quote from Schiller's famous letter to Goethe: "insists on explaining everything, understanding everything, measuring everything. She admits of no darkness, nothing incommensurable: where her torch throws no light there nothing can exist....She does not prize what is false but does not always perceive what is true!" That is why my English

friend could never understand the Indian mind and condemned *vairagya* as "the sickly spawn of a morbid distaste for the world."

Luckily for me, Chadwick happened to be on the spot; so I brought the two together. I shall never forget the great encounter, the memorable "tug-of-war" that followed when "a Greek met a Greek". Were space at my disposal I would have loved to depict the whole duologue. But I must not omit the dramatic *denouement*.

I shall call my critical good friend by the name of Mr. Pontiff.

Mr. Pontiff: I know, Mr. Chadwick, that your Master has attracted a number of men and women of merit and mark. But that is just the reason why we expect them to *do* something.

Chadwick: But we *are* doing something.

Mr. Pontiff: I will ask you a simple question: What on earth are you doing?

Chadwick (smiling): Surely, Mr. Pontiff, as a man of the world, you cannot be unaware that a question may often be simple but not its answer.

Mr. Pontiff: I know that. But still?

Chadwick: Supposing I said: each of us here has to come to grips with his ego?

Mr. Pontiff: And when he wins?

Chadwick: The Kingdom of Heaven begins—for him, at all events.

Mr. Pontiff: But for the rest of us?

Chadwick (smiling): Why not "wait and see", like Mr. Asquith?

Mr. Pontiff (looking at him intently): Don't you think we have been waiting long enough without *seeing* anything?"

Chadwick: Is that a charge framed against us, the quietists, as you love to put it?

Mr. Pontiff: Well, partly. But look here, Mr. Chadwick. Let's be frank and not go on fencing to no purpose. I have not come all this way just to pick holes in your Master's way of doing things. I admire him because he believes in our terrestrial evolution. But after all, you must admit that in spite of our recurring failures and grievous stumblings it's *we*, the activists of the West, who dominate the world, and not the passive contemplatives of the East. These can indeed point out to us some of our wrong moves and mistakes; outsiders often can, like the bystanders who watch a game of chess. Don't misunderstand me. I would be the last person to say that the East has no wisdom to impart to us. But then her prophets must become a little more dynamic and come *out* to give it and not stay immured in their ivory towers of peace and meditation and self-conquest. The world moves forward propelled by the law of give and take: if you have nothing to give, you are as good as lost, if not dead, to the rest. For when all is said and done, the world your Master wants to create can only come into being when its best spirits work for *all* under the broad light of the sun—and not in the impenetrable darkness of a cloistered seclusion.

Chadwick (after a pause): You have put your case rather ably, Mr. Pontiff, I will freely allow. But let me also ask



you a simple question in my turn. You firmly believe (don't you?) that the world can only be bettered if and when its best spirits work outside on a common platform and not, like the ruminant Easterners, in peaceful Ashrams?

Mr. Pontiff: That's right.

Chadwick: You claim also (do you not?) that the best spirits of the West have not made the mistake of the East, in that they have so far worked outside on the visible platform of activism—at any rate since the advent of science and industrialism?

Mr. Pontiff: (nods)

Chadwick: Well then, answer my question as man to man: is the Western civilisation rising on the upward curve or falling on the downward?

Mr. Pontiff (startled): You mean—

Chadwick: You know perfectly well what I mean. Why do you come to the East to sound her wisdom if all is *essentially* well with the occidental outlook on life? So please answer me: do you still really believe that the rose of the Western civilization can possibly come into flowering till we find out how to settle our score once for all with the deadly canker that is eating into its core?

Mr. Pontiff: And suppose I asked you—what is that canker?

Chadwick (smiling): Suppose I told you it's made up of diverse "isms" presided over by your frantic itch to rush about doing something convincing when you are far from convinced either about rightness of your vision or about the correctness of your method? Yes, I do claim one has to

win the right vision first before one can find a clue to the right action.

Mr. Pontiff (with a lowered head): I apologise.... because....

Chadwick: Because—?

Mr. Pontiff (after a hesitant pause): I begin to understand.

\*                      \*                      \*

I have intentionally given the duologue a dramatic turn but it is not all invention: they did joust at each other with animation as well as sincerity and the substance of the debate, as I have given it, is authentic. I can still remember how impressed I was when Chadwick drove Mr. Pontiff to the wall and how the latter admitted his defeat like a sportsman and apologised. (After his departure Chadwick told me, with his characteristic British irony, how queer was modern Europe's outlook on the fundamental human impulse which led one to seek the extra-cosmic Divine before one could understand or get reconciled to the din and discord of our earthly life, the impulse which had made him write his beautiful invocation to the World-Mother:

On this dark spirit-main  
Rise as a full-orbed moon,  
Transform the murk of pain  
To fleckless silver boon.  
Out from a planet's gloom  
All aspects call to Thee,—

Life in our stirless tomb,  
Light on our darkened sea.

I sent a full account of it to Gurudev at the time, and a smile of irony must have hovered round his lips when he commented on the scene which I had reconstructed from memory:

"The view of the world of which Pontiff possibly spoke (he may have meant something more superficial and trivial) cannot come from the mind, still less from the vital expecting something from life as it is. For life *as it is* has nothing to give except to those who are satisfied with surface pleasures." Then, agreeing with Chadwick's view, he went on to add: "The inner view can come only from a change of consciousness which sees the deeper inner life behind appearances and it is that change of consciousness which was developing in you because you were drawing back from the vital view of things—the *vairagya* was only an outward and negative sign of that withdrawal."

Naturally I did not expect Mr. Pontiff to understand all this, any more than I expected him to understand what Gurudev wrote to me in another letter explaining how far he could undersign what was dubbed *vairagya* and just where he drew the line.

"I have objected in the past to *vairagya* of the ascetic and the *tamasic* kind," he wrote. "The *vairagya* of one who has tasted the world's gifts or prizes but found them insufficient or tasteless and turns away towards a higher ideal, or the *vairgya* of one who has done his part in life's battles

but seen that something greater is demanded of the soul, is perfectly helpful and a good gate to the Yoga....By ascetic *vairagya* I mean that which denies life and world altogether and wants to disappear into the Indefinable—I object to it because my object is to bring the Divine *into* life. But if one is satisfied with life *as it is*, then there is no reason to seek to bring the Divine *into* life. So *vairagya* in the sense of dissatisfaction with life *as it is* is perfectly admissible and, in a certain sense, indispensable for my Yoga.”

I do not know whether Mr. Pontiff will ever chance upon my estimate of his short-sighted pragmatism. But in case he does and decides (as is not unlikely) that I have failed to understand him, I would only say this in self-defence that I have railed at him not as an individual but as a type of that mentality which judges even of occult things from a surface-view. If I may use a hackneyed proverb to make my point, I will hazard that not only is it true that none but the wearer knows where the shoe pinches but also that one cannot claim to have stepped into the Yogic shoes till one keeps them on even when they make one bleed, as nothing less can bring home to one the deep maladjustment between one's self-will and the Divine Will, a maladjustment that warped even some gods into rebels, as the sages say.



## CHAPTER IX

### GURU, THE ALCHEMIST

To emphasise the difficulty which every Yogi has to face, and for a long time, let me venture a little further and say that the moment one gets along in Yoga, be it ever so little, the ego is confronted with new trials at every turn insomuch that one often feels like throwing up the sponge in despair. At such crises it is only the Guru's direct help and sleepless guidance that can lift one out of the perilous slough of despond. But the trouble is that the Guru's help can hardly be fully effective without the co-operation of the disciple who is generally too apt to rely more on miracle than on *sadhana*. That is why in spite of the Guru's repeated warnings he is found so prone to mistake a *tamasic* passivity for the *sattwic* surrender. Another reason is that the fool's paradise, however ephemeral, is delectable so long as it lasts; in other words, it is delightful to be lulled to optimism by the illusion that since all is right with the Supervisor above, nothing can be seriously wrong with the workmen below. Apropos, I remember clearly the bad jolt given me once by a co-disciple who said to me, with unction: "If one has to make an effort all the time what, in the name of good sense, is the point of having a Guru?" His whole psychological bent made him look up,

first and last, to the miracle of Sri Aurobindo's Force as the one and only solvent of all our difficulties. I told him that Sri Aurobindo had written once clearly and categorically to Nirod on this very point. "The mistake is to think that it must be either a miraculous Force or none. There is no miraculous Force and I do not deal in miracles." And then: "What is Sri Aurobindo's Force? If it is not a personal property of this body of mine, it is a higher Force used by me or acting through me. Of course it is a Divine Force, for there is only one Force acting in the world, but it acts according to the nature of the instrument."

But, as the psycho-analyst rightly says, human beings are incalculable. For as soon as I quoted this letter for my friend's eternal edification, his eyes danced with joy. "I heartily agree," he cried triumphantly, "for that is just why I adore Gurudev: he will know how to act on me. Why then must I fall back upon individual effort when I can get things done more speedily and effectively by surrender? For since I have come to surrender, the Divine Force will surely act through Sri Aurobindo and transform me." Feeling bewildered, if not discomfited, I appealed again to Gurudev to tell us something definite to go upon and not leave us suspended in mid-air. Whereupon he wrote to me:

"In the early part of sadhana—and by early I do not mean a short part—effort is indispensable. Surrender of course, but surrender is not a thing that is done in a day. The mind has its ideas and it clings to them—the human vital resists surrender, for what it calls surrender in the

early stages is a doubtful kind of self-giving with a demand in it—the physical consciousness is like a stone and what it calls surrender is often no more than inertia. It is only the psychic that knows how to surrender and the psychic is usually very much veiled in the beginning. When the psychic awakes, it can bring a sudden and true surrender of the whole being, for the difficulty of the rest is rapidly dealt with and disappears. *But till then effort is indispensable.* Or else it is necessary till the Force comes flooding down into the being from above and takes up the *sadhana*, does it for one more and more and leaves less and less to individual effort—but even then, if not effort, at least aspiration and vigilance are needed till the possession of mind, will, life and body by the Divine Power is complete.”

But one who has not practised Yoga will be hardly likely to realise the point Gurudev wanted to make when he suggested that effort and surrender are interdependent. So I shall close the topic with the report of a talk which a rather cheerful believer had once with Gurudev on this very point.

“I have tried, sir,” he said, “and tried hard, I assure you. But the more I tried, the more I felt it was no use trying till, in the end, I had a brainwave and realised that *you alone could and must* take us out of the wood. So accept us—we are going with you.”

Sri Aurobindo only smiled and said:

“I wish you did.”

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What Gurudev meant was simple enough. But what he implied was not quite so simple. It is not easy to tame the ego. And the task seems for a long time to go on deepening in difficulty as our egos, when scanned, reveal many spirals and kinks. That is why the act of surrender has remained all along at once the most simple and the most difficult of achievements. And that is also why one can never expect to achieve it by one's unaided effort. Either the Divine Grace has to intervene or—which is the same thing with those who have taken to a Guru—one has to open oneself more and more to the Guru's Force till the reversal of consciousness is finally accomplished. Yoga becomes difficult because, among other things, most of us find it far from easy to be simple in this age of deep sophistication brought about by the exorbitant clamouring of the mental part of us to dominate the show and side-track the issue. But, for good or for evil, being "sons of an intellectual age" as Gurudev puts it, we needs must make the best of a bad bargain and endeavour to plod on. And I tried on my part even to cajole my intellect to indemnify me for the loss of my simplicity which was so native to my ancestors. So while on the one hand I wanted to understand Gurudev by questioning him, on the other, I wanted to have the benefit of his ready help in spite of my deep mental reserve even though he, in his infinite compassion, assured me again and again that he was perfectly ready "*to carry me all the way*" if only I would let him. But precisely there was the rub: my mental reserve did not want to sign the blank cheque, as I called it, with the result



that I had to trudge on as best I could, profiting, indeed, by his support but not leaning too much on it. Is it any wonder that I should have, in the circumstances, found my way rather hard and rough in spite of the immense help I got from his tireless tolerance and specific directions? One could not both eat one's cake and have it. I could not very well decline the helping light and yet hope to dispel overnight the clinging darkness which caused me again and again to miss his smile of welcome and to misunderstand his injunctions—simple enough in all conscience—till once, surpassing myself in foolishness, I asked him, rhetorically, how I could possibly be expected to say that I wanted only to give myself to the Divine and not want Him, when I did want Him with "every drop of my blood"! "Could I afford to be dishonest?" I wrote grandiloquently and patted myself for having been at once downright and clever if not original and brilliant!

Finally, to force the issue, I proposed to him to be allowed to do without food. I half meant it, I suppose, though I must have dreaded the prospect as I was, I still claim, an out and out normal man who had never found a regime of fasting invigorating.

"Since I find, Guru," I advocated, "that do what I will I simply cannot accept the idea of surrendering my ego to your Lordship; since I find life meaningless without a deepening response from the Divine; and, lastly, since I find, I repeat, that I sincerely want you to endow me with the strength which I so badly need to be able to get round my pride—please let me know if you will now approve

of my *prayopaveshana*. I have read in the lives of some Yogis that they tried it in the last resort and succeeded, even though Christ tabooed it by saying that one must not 'tempt God'. Still if you approve I *will* try".

Which brought me one of his tenderest letters.

"Dilip", he wrote, "I wrote to you all that in answer to your statement about your former idea of the Yoga that if one wanted the Divine, the Divine himself would take up the purifying of the heart and develop the *sadhana* and give the necessary experiences. I meant to say that it can and does happen in that way if one has trust and confidence in the Divine and the genuine will to surrender. For such a taking up involves one's putting oneself in the hands of the Divine rather than trusting to one's own efforts alone and this implies one's putting one's trust and confidence in the Divine and a progressive self-giving. It is in fact the principle of *sadhana* that I myself followed and it is the central part of Yoga as I envisage it. It is, I suppose, what Sri Ramakrishna meant by the method of the baby cat in his image.<sup>1</sup> But all cannot follow that at once: it takes time for them to arrive at it—it grows most when the mind and the vital fall quiet.

"What I meant by surrender was this inner surrender of the mind and the vital. There is, of course, the outer surrender also: the giving up of all that is found to conflict

<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna said that the baby monkey clings to its mother whereas the baby cat lets itself be carried by its mother in a spirit of utter surrender and trust.

with the spirit or need of the *sadhana*, the offering, the obedience to the guidance of the Divine, whether directly, if one has reached that stage, or through the psychic or to the guidance of the Guru. I may say that *prayopaveshana* has nothing to do with surrender: it is a form of *tapasya* of a very austere—and in my opinion, very excessive—kind, often dangerous. But I was speaking of the inner surrender.

“The core of this inner surrender is trust and confidence in the Divine. One takes the attitude ‘I want the Divine and nothing else. (I do not know why you should think that you can be asked to give up that—if there is not that, then the Yoga cannot be done). I want to give myself entirely to him and since my soul wants that, it cannot be but that I shall meet and realise him. I ask nothing but that and his action in me to bring me to him, his action secret or open, veiled or manifest. I do not insist on *my* own time and way: let him do all in *his* own time and way, I shall believe in him, accept his will, aspire steadily for his light and presence and joy, go through all difficulties and delays, relying on him and never giving up. Let my mind be quiet and turn to him alone and let him open to it his calm and joy. All for him and myself for him. Whatever happens I will keep to this aspiration and self-giving and go on in perfect reliance that it will be done.”

“That is the attitude into which one must grow: for certainly it cannot be made perfect at once—mental and vital movements cut across—but if one keeps the will to it, it will grow in the being. The rest is a matter of



obedience to the guidance when it makes itself manifest—not allowing one's mental and vital movements to interfere.

"It was not my intention to say that this is the only way and *sadhana* cannot be done otherwise—there are so many others by which one can approach the Divine. But this is the only one I know by which the taking up of *sadhana* by the Divine becomes a sensible fact before the preparation of the nature is done. In other methods the Divine action may be felt from time to time, but it remains mostly behind the veil till all is ready. In some *sadhana* the Divine action is not recognised; all must be done by *tapasya*. In most there is a mixing of the two: the *tapasya* finally calling the direct help and intervention. The idea and experience of the Divine doing all belong to the Yoga based on surrender.

"But whatever way is followed, the one thing to be done is to be faithful and go on to the end. You have so often taken that attitude—stand by it, true to the inspiration of your soul.

"All can be done by the Divine: the heart and nature purified, the inner consciousness awakened, the veil removed—if one gives oneself to the Divine with trust and confidence and even if one cannot do so fully at once, yet the more one does so, the more the inner help and guidance come and the contact and the experience of the Divine grow within. If the questioning mind becomes less active and humility and the will to surrender grow in you, this ought to be perfectly possible. No other strength and *tapasya* are then needed but this alone."



But I must again pause here to state once more, even at the risk of repetition, that what he called the "inner surrender", though difficult enough in all conscience, did not seem to us an unattainable ideal all along the line. What I mean will be perfectly intelligible to all who have trod this strait and thorny path spiralling up to self-perfection. For any sincere pilgrim on this path will have realised in his bright moods what a joy it is to *want* to surrender; he will ache to dedicate all he has and is to the Guide outside, whom he can and does equate in his moments of clear vision with the Guide within. But, thanks to motley forces, these bright moments often enough get blurred, assailed by clouds and storms and ambushed glooms so that we are deflected from the Path. It is true that these, even when they attack us, cannot render us *hors de combat*, if we are fundamentally sincere and loyal, but it is equally true, alas, that the bulk of *sadhakas*, in every clime and age, must be heirs to human weaknesses and therefore liable to discouragement. (Not for nothing did Shaw write in his *Back to Methuselah* that even his redoubtable "Ancients" could only die from two causes, one of which is discouragement.) That is why every aspirant who has followed this arduous path has had to learn, to his bitter cost, that he can never learn enough the lesson of loyalty to and reliance on the Guru's help without which one can never hope to fare far in his path. But even though our native egoism can make it at times all but impossible for us to be schooled in the safe and simple art of turning to the Guru for help, it will be untrue to say that it is only diffi-

culties one chafes against all the time. For no one who has sincerely and humbly prayed for help can say with truth that his prayer has never been heard. Had it been so, very few of us could have persisted in counting on the Light when the prospects seemed too dark for words. Also, let me add, through every experience of gloom one does come by something permanently and one of the richest rewards of wrestling with one's own ego is to gain an overwhelming experience, vivid and concrete, namely, a deepening insight into one's own nature in all its complexity. As Gurudev wrote to me once: "Nobody can understand himself or human nature if he does not perceive the multi-personality of the human-being." I do not claim that nothing but Yoga can afford one this clue. Every man who has earnestly striven for self-perfection in life has had to face up to this staggering fact. Even as early as 1795 when Goethe was busy with his scientific studies, he wrote in his famous *Zur Morphology*: "Every living being is not a unity but a plurality. Even when it appears as an individual, it is the reunion of beings living and existing in themselves, identical in origin, but which may appear identical or similar, different or dissimilar."

"The more imperfect a being is the more do its individual parts resemble each other, and the more do these parts resemble the whole. The more perfect the being is the more dissimilar are its parts. In the former case the parts are more or less a repetition of the whole: in the latter case they are totally unlike the whole."

It is as a result of this eminently verifiable fact of life

through personal experience that human beings have remained incalculable since the dawn of time. Not only that: with the passage of time this element of unpredictableness grows (even as a child grows in stature from day to day) till in adult consciousness every evolved being stands literally bewildered before the warring impulses in his own personality, some pulling him down, others making him soar, as Goethe expressed once with his rare power of imagery. "And when I think that I'm sitting on my hack and riding to the station I am in duty bound for, all of a sudden the mare under me will turn into a creature with uncontrollable desires and wings and run right away from me."

But few people can be as conscious as Goethe of "this multitudinousness in human personality", far less win any clue to the supreme art of harmonising the disparate strands of our nature.<sup>1</sup> Gurudev has explained this not only in his numerous letters but, what is infinitely more helpful,

<sup>1</sup> I have related elsewhere an experience—which I need not therefore repeat—with a Maharani. I spoke to her about my faith in the spiritual reality when I was in the grip of gloomy doubts. I wrote to Gurudev asking whether I had been insincere. To which he replied: "Your experience with the Maharani. That happens to everybody; it is when that part of the consciousness comes up which not only believes these things but knows them to be true: the other part which is depressed and open to doubt and denial takes then a back seat or goes underground. People do not know this multitudinousness in human personality, so they call it insincerity in themselves or in others. But it is nothing of the kind. There are certain beliefs and feelings which something in our nature holds on to with a firm grip, and storms and despondencies only cover but cannot destroy them."

(See *Among the Great*, American Edition—pp. 252-353)



has placed within our reach the supreme talisman of his Yogic force without which we could at best curb to some extent our "uncontrollable desires" and incomprehensible impulses, but never find the way to changing intrinsically their native movements. As, however, this is not a practical treatise on Yoga I shall not expatiate on this theme any further, but conclude this chapter with just a personal instance if only to make clear what exactly I want to convey by emphasizing the role of the 'transformer' as against that of the 'censor'.

When I came to be initiated in Yoga, I had no very clear idea of what "transformation of nature" meant. So I used to ask Gurudev again and again for clarification. Many of these letters have been published so that those who want more light can easily profit by these explanations. All I propose to do here is to give a brief account of what I experienced about the practical side of this transformation under Gurudev's concrete help and guidance.

I knew of course that every aspirant was expected to inhibit, or shall I say reject, the movements of his lower nature. One knows how to *check* impulses; but as to how I was to *change* them I had only the haziest notions. Once in the 'thirties, I had a long talk with the *late* Upendranath Banerji, a quondam disciple of Gurudev. I remember his deep misgivings about the feasibility of transforming human nature. He said to me that he had definitely "experienced" that Yoga could bring into play forces which not only made a difference but sometimes even bordered upon the miraculous. But for all that he had remained unconvinced, he



added, about its ability to transform our natural and basic impulses. "Man remains at bottom what he is", he contended, "and if changes are brought about they can only be initiated laboriously and consolidated slowly by life, not Yoga."

But he was wrong, I told him this to his face as I gave him an account of my radically changed outlook on life. I talked about things that had appealed to me powerfully once but which appeared, after even a few years of Yoga, worse than pointless—for instance, my career as a musician, my great delight in travelling, my immense zest in several intellectual pursuits, my interest in engrossing pastimes like chess or delightful games like tennis and so on. He gave me a very patient and sympathetic hearing and seemed genuinely interested in my change as I called it, but he wanted something more convincing and concrete to go upon, like some lasting change in my life of instincts or long-standing attachments. I was silenced. For while on the one hand I could not tell all about my private life (and no one should—except to one's Guru) on the other I could not possibly make him see what I had seen for the simple reason that Yoga cannot be done by proxy any more than love-making can. Not only that: I knew him well; he was indeed a highly intelligent man; but his keen intelligence, like that of most intellectuals, demanded that spiritual truth be ultimately assayed by reason alone and that human intellect be the sole Judge of data which belonged to a realm beyond its own jurisdiction. Yet I showed him a letter which Gurudev had written to me in 1935:

"These things should not be spoken of but kept under cover. Even in ordinary non-spiritual things the action of invisible or subjective forces is open to doubt and discussion in which there could be no material certitude—while the spiritual force is invisible in itself and also invisible in its action. So it is idle to try to prove that such and such a result was the effect of spiritual force. Each must form his own ideas about that—for if it is accepted it cannot be *as a result of* proof and argument, but only as a result of experience, of faith or of that insight in the heart or the deeper intelligence which looks behind appearances and sees what is behind them. *The spiritual consciousness does not claim in that way, it can state the truth about itself but not fight for personal acceptance. A general and impersonal statement about the spiritual force is another matter, but I doubt whether the time has come for it or whether it could be understood by the mere reasoning intelligence.*"

But in as much as Gurudev permitted me last year to publish in America what he had told me about his occult experiences, I may, I think, venture to make public what I could not, twelve years ago. For I know from personal experience that many people are tired today of this sterile scepticism—as I was before my plunge for Yoga. Even one of the greatest of modern sceptics, Bertrand Russell, a thinker who once preached the gospel of "the will to doubt" says today in 1950: "But if philosophy is to serve a positive purpose, it must not teach mere scepticism, for, while the dogmatist is harmful, the sceptic is useless."

A welcome change indeed—in one who fought so hard

against faith and for so long! So I may perhaps make bold to relate what I have experienced personally about the effectivity of Gurudev's power functioning slowly but surely as that of a true alchemist. I shall try not to overstate what I went through.

When I had finally taken refuge in the Ashram, in 1928, I was far from realising the import of Gurudev's *sadhana* and aim, especially when he wrote: "I do not wish to disguise from you the difficulty of this great and tremendous change or the possibility that you may have a long and hard work before you" etc.<sup>1</sup> I had not even fully envisaged what was implied by his wanting to change the stuff of our nature without which the higher Yogic consciousness could not, he stressed, possibly come to stay. I only knew of the rejection of the wrong impulses, which everybody equates with controlling or curbing.

But the more I curbed these the more it was borne home to me (little by little till I became fully alive to the magnitude of the task I was up against) that although one could act faultlessly up to a point—even nobly "scorning delights and living laborious days"—such Miltonic feats of will, however difficult and praiseworthy, fell far short of the aim of Yoga, namely, the total transformation of the impulses which bred the faults and their attendant disharmonies. To give an instance or two: I found that I could, generally speaking, restrain my temper but not help feeling irritated; or

<sup>1</sup> I have quoted the letter in full in Chapter V while giving an account of the difficulties I had to encounter.



refuse tasty dishes but not do away with the greed for them.

The first defect I have yet to get rid of utterly. But it was the second, which I am going to write about, that gave me much more trouble—and how stubbornly! I shall put it as briefly as I can.

When I came to the Ashram I had, naturally, to agree to the vegetarian diet, as Gurudev and Mother were both in favour of vegetarianism. I wanted, nevertheless, to eat fish and meat, especially fish which my Bengali palate simply “adored” like a gourmand. So I missed it more than anything else. I had been told by some that I would get used to the simple vegetarian diet. But the prophecy was not fulfilled. With time my desire for fish only grew till I felt guilty, secretly, and struggled conscientiously against my greed. But in vain. I dreamed of fish—night after night. After eight years of Ashram life I went out for three months and found that my first love, fish, had not yet been supplanted by any other. (Upendranath Banerji's doubt had something, indeed, to go upon.) I returned to the Ashram a sadder if a wiser man. To have practised Yoga under the aegis of the greatest Yogi of today and yet to have succumbed to my greed for such inferior pleasures the moment I went outside! But do what I would, I could not bring myself to decline whenever fish was offered to me in Calcutta and elsewhere. Again and again I took a silent vow never to touch fish any more but again and again I broke it as soon as my friends and relations pressed me to take fish. To cut a long story short, my remorse was brought to a



head when, in 1938, I went on eating fish at the palace of my friend and host, Rajarao Dhirendra Narayan Roy. I felt more ill-at-ease in his company since he was at the time a strict vegetarian under medical advice, so that I had no longer even the excuse of being tempted to eat fish in order to be social. But although my weakness made me depressed, yet I simply could not reform. I had had a high opinion of my will-power and sincerity and both now left me in the lurch with a consequent damage to my self-respect because I was telling others that it did not matter, even quoting scripture like the Prince of Darkness:

"I think the importance of *sattwic* food from the spiritual point of view has been exaggerated. Food is rather a question of hygiene etc."<sup>1</sup>

It was eleven years ago and I cannot clearly recall what happened on that memorable night when, after having declined to eat fish for a few days, I again succumbed. All I can remember is that it was a banquet given in my honour by the Rajarao and that the famous caterers Firpo had been requisitioned to make the banquet worthy of my host and his distinguished literary guests. I must have been pressed by these to be convivial and so forced to capitulate once again to the irresistible lobsters and the peerless *hilsa* from the Ganges.

That unforgettable night! After the great *éclat* came the inevitable reaction and I felt simply ashamed of myself as

<sup>1</sup> This letter written to a friend of mine in 1937 was printed subsequently in Vol. II of *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, Section XI.

never before. I tried to drown my qualms in sleep but in vain. So I got up, lighted some incense-sticks and prayed at the foot of a portrait of Gurudev. As I thought of him, tears coursed freely down my cheeks.

I do not know how to convince my readers. Probably they will simply decline to be convinced and I can hardly blame them if they doubt my testimony, the less because when all is said, one *is* often led to exaggerate (even magnify a molehill into a mountain) when one feels, as I do, a deep gratitude to the benefactor one apotheosizes. I must confess that I wish with all my heart that others might look at the greatness of Gurudev with my eyes even as I feel a real pity for those who cannot or, rather, will not. But even when I confess to all this, I cannot possibly admit that I am consciously distorting the experience I have decided to relate as simply and truthfully as I can.

I saw that night the radiant figure of Gurudev—in my dream. He gave me his blessing and said: "From tomorrow you will be able to give up fish."

He vanished. I woke up in a thrill of joy. From the next day I not only gave up fish but felt no longer any hankering for it. I have indeed taken fish a few times since but never with the same relish nor consciousness of being a bonds slave to my palate. Perhaps once or twice in six months I have tasted fish but what is far more convincing to me, not to mention gratifying, is that since that momentous night I have never felt the least craving for fish. Also, shall I add that I have even last year, during my protracted musical tour, stayed with rich *épîcures* and *gourmets* and sat at

their tables day after day without touching fish once, even though pressed hard not to behave like a spoilsport. And incidentally, I realised what Mother told me once: "If you can really conquer a desire for good you will experience that abstention gives you a far greater delight than yielding."

Now that I have hazarded it I might as well hazard relating what happened to a dear friend of mine, since it is, to my mind, even more convincing. Briefly, it is like this:

He was a hard drinker and simply could not do without the bottle, day after day. It was a long-standing habit of more than twenty years. He and his friends and relations tried strenuously but no influence could wean him from his addiction, till he came under the influence of Gurudev and the Mother. He became a disciple and was asked to pledge himself to be an abstainer from alcohol. He gave that pledge and he has not broken it since, not once, nor even felt tempted to drink again, which to me is far more convincing, knowing as I do about fish, and surely alcohol is a dictator more difficult to resist than fish.

But the Yogic Force (which produced such indubitable results and effected changes in the aspirant's outer nature) being invisible to most of us when it is actually working as a leaven in our being and consciousness, we do often feel hard put to it to accept its functioning as "businesslike and practical"—as I often put it to Gurudev. Not that I did not *want* to believe—sometimes I actually *longed* to believe—and yet how difficult did I find it not to doubt what he asserted as hundred per cent authentic and verifiable! And with what an accent would he exhort me!—



"It is this faith you need to develop," he wrote once to me in the 'thirties, "a faith which is in accordance with reason and common sense—that if the Divine exists and has called you to the path, as is evident, then there must be a Divine Guidance behind and that through and in spite of all difficulties you shall arrive. Not to listen to the hostile voices that suggest failure or to the voices of that impatient vital that echo them, not to believe that because great difficulties are there, there can be no success or that because the Divine has not yet shown himself he will never show himself, but to take the position that every one takes when he fixes his mind on a great and difficult goal: 'I will go on till I succeed and I will succeed—all difficulties notwithstanding', to which the believer in the Divine adds: 'The Divine exists, He is there, and since He exists, my following after Him cannot fail. I will go through everything till I find Him.'"

When he wrote this he knew of course that it was not so easy for impatient aspirants like us, with our eyes glued to quick results, to have an unshakable faith in "an invisible force producing tangible results" as I phrased it. So he went on getting round my non-experience with all the weight of his experience of which I must give one more instance before I draw this topic to a close.

After he wrote to me his famous letter on doubt (quoted in full in my *Among the Great*) I had a wordy tussle with a *sadhaka* in the Ashram. In this instance he seemed to have caught something but I thought he was expressing himself badly when he claimed that "Sri Aurobindo's Force" could not be called "invisible" since it translated itself in



"visible changes" even in the outer nature of many an aspirant. So I wrote to Gurudev requesting him to throw some light on this somewhat obscure point. After a lot of speculation I ended on my old note of helpless query: did the Force mean business? Were the changes stressed by my friend incontrovertible?—and so on!

To which he wrote back:

"The Invisible Force producing tangible results both inward and outward is the whole meaning of the Yogic consciousness. Your question about Yoga bringing merely a feeling of Power without any result was really very strange. Who would be satisfied with such a meaningless hallucination and call it Power? If we had not had thousands of experiences showing that the Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements, change the character, influence men and things, control the conditions and functionings of the body, work as a concrete dynamic Force on other forces, modify events, etc. etc., we would not speak of it as we do. Moreover, it is not only in its results but in its movements that the Force is tangible and concrete. When I speak of feeling Force or Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being able to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movements, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way as of other opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of Yoga."

And then in reply to my pointed question about my own capacity to achieve results he wrote in the end:

"It is not that you are incapable of it, for it was several times on the point of being done. But your external mind has interfered always—questioning, doubting, asking for something more external, not waiting for the movement to continue, for the inward to externalise itself and make itself concrete. That is why I object to this worship of doubt. It is not that I used not to have doubts myself more formidable than any you have ever thought of—but I did not allow them to interfere with the development of my experience: I let it continue until it had sufficient body for me to know what it was and what it could bring me."

What he referred to here as "on the point of being done" in myself was an experience which used to recur constantly in those days: a deepening of consciousness would set in till I would be just on the point of crossing a line; I would then in my impatience want to expedite this with my active mind and instantly lose the experience. In other words, I strove a little too hard in my meditation which created a tension and thereby made me forfeit the legitimate fruit of my arduous endeavour because of my unyogic attitude of non-passivity. Mother told me pointedly that this created a tension in my consciousness and that was why I balked just on the threshold of experience. This made me so despondent that I wrote a long letter to Gurudev reproaching him for having kept me in the dark so long when I had been going on the wrong track all through.

"But this is unfair, Guru", I wrote in a rapid crescendo of despair, "since your Yoga, now offered to us, seems to be cultured for the use of Avatars like you or the Mother.

But then how could it help us, feckless mortals, who must take only one of two attitudes: effort or inertia. So I strained, alas, only to be told that straining could not help. And yet when X wrote he wanted to do nothing you girded at his lethargy and Mother told him that God only helped those who helped themselves! You do remind one of Krishna who enjoyed driving Arjuna mad by exhorting him to hunt with the hounds just after having counselled him to run with the hare."

He gave me a long reply to this which I need not quote in full as it has already been printed in part: I shall only quote a portion from it which was kept back at the time as being too personal.

He took, first, great pains to explain to me that it was not inertia which he advocated when he had discouraged tension; then he came pat to the point:

"Now as to the tension and stiffness, the Mother saw it this time in your meditation with her because she had to look for the impediment. You told her that in meditating with her you never felt conscious of anything—and yet it ought not to be so since your receptivity was beyond doubt and you yourself say that you have always found the personal contact helpful."

Next, after stressing once more the difference between a "vital straining and pulling and a spontaneous psychic openness", he added:

"It is not that pulling and straining and tension can do nothing; in the end they prevail for some result or another, but with difficulty, delay, struggle, strong upheavals of the



Force breaking through in spite of all. Sri Ramakrishna himself began by pulling and straining and got his result, but at the cost of a tremendous and perilous upsetting; afterwards he took the quiet psychic way whenever he wanted a result and got it with ease and in a minimum time. You say that this way is too difficult for you or the likes of you and it is only 'Avatars' like myself or the Mother that can do it. That is a strange misconception, for it is on the contrary the easiest and simplest and the most direct way, and anyone can do it, if he makes his mind and vital quiet; even those who have a tenth of your capacity can do it. It is the other way of tension and strain and hard endeavour that is difficult and needs a great force of *tapasya*. As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer, a work such as I am certain none else had to do before us. For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent or embody the Divine, but to represent, too, the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or *lila* but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path."

And lastly with what solicitude and tender affection he consoled the recalcitrant!—



"But it is not necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others—if they will only consent to take it. It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge upon you and others: Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you—if secretly, he will show himself in good time—do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey."

I do not know if any other Guru in the past ever wrote such language not only throbbing with sincerity but—in the words of Madame Gabriel Mistral in her tribute to Sri Aurobindo—"presenting the rare phenomenon of an exposition clear as a beautiful diamond without the danger of confounding the layman." And she cogently adds: "Six foreign languages have given the Master of Pondicherry a gift of co-ordination, a clarity free from gaudiness, and a charm that borders on the magical....We have before us a prose which approximates to that of the great Eckhart, German classicist and fountain-head of European mysticism." So she rejoices: "These are indeed 'glad tidings' that come to us: to know that there is a place in the world where culture has reached its tone of dignity by uniting in one man a supernatural life with a consummate literary style, thus making use of his beautifully austere and classical prose to serve as the handmaid of the spirit."

She has hit the nail on the head, for the Guru in Sri Aurobindo becomes so convincing to sceptics like myself

because even when we stay opaque to his spiritual vision, he moves us, in spite of ourselves, to a partial psychic translucency by this irresistible "gift" of his crystalline experience and expression which "reaches us" at a time when we are besieged by a "petrifying materialism."<sup>1</sup>

As I read the above tribute after the passing away of Sri Aurobindo on the 5th December, last year (1950), a great sadness invaded me. Yes, I told myself, she is right. Perhaps it was this obstinate crust of scepticism even in his disciples, on whom he had showered so much love, that was partly responsible for his withdrawal! And what a love it was! It moved me to joy and melancholy when I read this burning aspiration to change the suffering earth by the light he had himself attained and yet could not fully bring down—just because we, his might-have-been beneficiaries, combated it with our deep, persistent denial and would not even wholly believe that he had indeed come to us:

To change the earthly life to life divine.

And yet we asked ourselves if he had really meant it when he said:

"I climb not to thy everlasting Day,  
Even as I have shunned thy eternal Night,"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The quotations from Madame Mistral are taken from a tribute she contributed to *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1950.

<sup>2</sup> *Savitri*, The Book of Everlasting Day

because the supreme manifestation must be sought not in the Empyrean but here below, on earth:

“Earth is the chosen place of the mightiest souls ;  
Earth is the heroic spirit’s battlefield,  
The forge where the Arch-mason shapes his works.”

And lastly, when the Godhead invited him urgently to

“Renounce the tie that joins thee to earth-kind,  
Cast off thy sympathy with mortal hearts...  
Ascend, O soul, into thy blissful home...  
And share not in the toil of Nature’s powers...  
Cast off the ambiguous myth of earth’s desire,  
O immortal, to felicity arise,”

then he rose to the occasion and answered that he had never hankered for a selfish salvation in order to be able to escape the limitations of humanity, because

“If man lives bound by his humanity,  
If he is tied for ever to his pain,”

then the “creation would be “vain” and “this great world” would be

“A nothing that in Time’s moments seems to be.”

One is reminded of the great Prahlad’s prayer to the Lord in the Bhagavat:

“Often, O Lord, the solitaires  
    in a silence live apart  
Like aliens yearning only for  
    their own salvation’s marvel art,  
Oblivious to the anarchy  
    of life, unmindful of the vast  
And varied pain wherewith the earth  
    is soaked from centre to the crust!  
Who will redeem this suffering  
    if thy Compassion stand aside?  
I ache not for salvation—if  
    the rest in misery abide.”



## CHAPTER X

### THE POET-MAKER

I REFERRED, in the seventh chapter, to Sri Aurobindo as a poet-maker. In this I am going to transcribe a part of my experience on which I based the remark, less to convince others than to state—as truthfully as I can—some of the data which carried conviction to me, personally. Those who are not interested in the title of the present chapter or are likely to find it tendentious may well pass it by. I know of course that what I am claiming here is liable to be misunderstood since my chief datum is going to be my own poetic flowering. But I have thought fit to risk it because nobody else will be able to present the material I possess and so if I keep silent, a great trait of Sri Aurobindo's character will stay for ever unknown, to wit, the pains he took, with almost incredible patience, not only to help those who wanted to give a poetical expression to spiritual truth and experience, but also to knock the bottom out of a prevalent false notion that Yoga belongs to the province of silence to the exclusion of expression. Also it was because he was a great poet that it was given to him to assay such truths about spiritual poetry which had been his *grande passion* long before he started Yoga. He himself once said (as one of his earliest disciples, Sri Nolini Kanta

Gupta, testifies in his preface to Gurudev's *Collected poems*) that he had been first and last a poet: it was only later that he became a Yogi. To be more explicit, I shall now hazard writing about what I came to know from indubitable personal experience to be true: that poets can be made through Yogic powers and that he achieved it consciously in quite a few of us. But this statement being against the widely accepted belief that poets are born and not made, I shall begin with a letter, written in 1931, in which he made a definite statement about Yogic powers which is too clear and categoric to be dismissed by anybody who comes to the question with the humility of an open mind. As, however, in this he wrote about poetry somewhat incidentally, I must first explain, briefly, its context.

My brother-in-law, Bhavashankar, came to our Ashram with my sister, Maya; my little niece Esha; a grand-uncle, Saurin and a cousin, Sachin. He had a revolver which he deposited on arrival with the Police Commissioner of Pondicherry. On the day before his departure he went with Sachin to claim his revolver. About an hour later, as I was composing a poem in my room, Sachin burst in excitedly and told me how they had both had a narrow escape. Here was his story:

When my brother-in-law, with Sachin, called on the Police Commissioner, he was received very cordially. After a friendly chat the latter showed him a French revolver and explained something about the trigger which he pressed, casually, when, lo, two shots rang out in quick succession and the bullets, grazing past them, pierced the

bonnet of a motor car which was standing in front of the verandah where they were sitting. The sudden shock completely unnerved both of them, as may well be imagined.

They all left Pondicherry for Bengal the day after, in the last week of August. What happened next will appear from what I wrote to Gurudev on 1.9.1931.

"O Guru," I wrote, "you remember the revolver incident? That was hair-raising enough in all conscience; but what followed was even more sensational! Saurin has written to me a long letter and is convinced that nothing but your Force and the Mother's protective Grace could have saved them when it was literally a case of touch and go. But I am running ahead of my story.

"They got down at Sheorapuli and took a ferry boat to cross over to Barrackpore. As the Ganges is now in spate after the rains, the ferry rocked a little which made Bhavashankar nervous. He had been somewhat off his stride since the revolver episode and having been always a trifle afraid of the river—as he does not know how to swim—the moment he got up to come and sit by my sister he lost his balance and fell plump into the water in midstream. My sister, who is equally unable to swim, cried out: 'O Mother, Mother' and jumped madly into the river. Saurin screamed out: 'O Mother, O Gurudev, save us!'...But it was not easy to save two corpulent persons from a river in spate in midstream and it did seem that all was lost, when Bhavashankar's secretary, seeing a hand protruding out of the Ganges, leaned out and caught hold of it, and

almost simultaneously, a boatman who saw tufts of my sister's hair floating near the helm, seized them. But tell me, Guru, what are we to think of it all? Is it possible that your Force or Mother's took a hand in saving them? Also, tell me: had you or the Mother had any premonition of what was going to happen? You know, Guru, that I have had a European education and so find it rather difficult to believe that such things can really happen, but Saurin swears that he felt your intervention. My sister also is fully persuaded that you and the Mother were their saviours."

Lastly, I put a few questions to him about clairvoyance and the part that occult or Yogic powers can play in our day-to-day lives. These will be readily inferred from his reply which was first published in my *Anami* in 1934.

"Dilip," he wrote, "it is certainly possible to have consciousness of things going on at a distance and to intervene—you will hear from the Mother one or two instances from her own experiences. In this instance we had no such knowledge of the actual accident. When Bhavashankar was about to return to Bengal, both the Mother and myself became aware, independently, of a danger of death overhanging him—I myself saw it connected with the giddiness from which he suffered, but I did not look farther. If this extraordinary combination of the giddiness with the boat and the river had been foreseen by us, the accident itself would not have happened, I think, for against something specific one can always put a special force which in most cases of the kind prevents it from happening—unless indeed



it is a case of irresistible predestination, *Utkata Karma*, as the astrologers call it. Actually, we did as we always do when we see anything of the kind, we put a strong screen of protection round him. A general protection of that kind is not always unfailing, because the person may push it away from him or go out of its circle by some thought or act of his own; but usually we found it effective. In this case there were two persons, Maya and your grand-uncle, Saurin, who were open to the Mother and called to her in the moment of danger; and Bhavashankar himself had been at least touched. To that I attribute their escape.

"The idea that true Yogis do not or ought not to use such powers, I regard as an ascetic superstition. I believe that all Yogis who have these powers do use them whenever they find that they are called upon from within to do so. They may refrain if they think the use in a particular case is contrary to the Divine Will or see that preventing one evil may be opening the door to a worse one or for any other valid reason, but not from any general prohibitory rule. What is forbidden to anyone with a strong spiritual sense is to be a miracle-monger, performing extraordinary things for show, for gain, for fame, out of vanity or pride. It is forbidden to use powers from mere vital motives, to make an Asuric ostentation of them or to turn them into a support for arrogance, conceit, ambition or any other of the amiable weaknesses to which human nature is prone. It is because half-baked Yogis so often fall into these traps of the hostile forces that the use of the Yogic powers is sometimes discouraged as harmful to the user.

"But it is mostly people who live much in the vital that so fall; with a strong and free and calm mind and a psychic awake and alive, such pettinesses are not likely to occur. As for those who can live in the true Divine Consciousness, certain powers are not 'powers' at all in that sense, not, that is to say, supernatural or abnormal, but rather their *normal way of seeing and acting, part of the consciousness*—and how can they be forbidden, or refuse to act according to their consciousness and its nature?

"I suppose I have had myself an even more completely European education than you, and I have had, too, my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe. Abnormal, otherwise supra-physical experiences and powers, occult or Yogic, have always seemed to me something perfectly natural and credible. Consciousness in its very nature could not be limited by the ordinary physical human-animal consciousness; it must have other ranges. Yogic or occult powers are no more supernatural or incredible than is supernatural or incredible the power to write a great poem or compose great music; few people can do it, as things are,—not even one in a million: for poetry and music come from the inner being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being. *That is why you got the poetic power as soon as you began Yoga—Yogic force made the passage clear. It is the same with the Yogic consciousness and its powers; the*

*thing is to get the passage clear,—for they are already there within you. Of course the first thing is to believe, aspire and, with the true urge within, make the endeavour.”*<sup>1</sup>

I need hardly comment further on the phenomena, the less because being ignorant of the working of occult forces impinging on our world of senses, I prefer to keep my ignorance from speculating about things beyond my ken. So I shall attempt now what I know and understand a little better, namely, poetry and how he actually helped and inspired me.

But I will have to pause here and become, once more, a little autobiographical, since otherwise I may not be able to bring out how and why, in spite of my inherent scepticism, I have been persuaded that without his active help added to invisible Yogic powers I could not have achieved poetic utterance.

I can lay claim to having acquired early a taste for poetry and music. For music I have had a native aptitude since I was a child. But my taste for poetry developed later till, in my adolescence, it grew into a ruling passion. But I knew very little about the technique of poetry. Before I came to the Ashram I had, indeed, written and published a few poems, but I cannot say that I am very proud of them. My style and rhythm were halting, so much so that Tagore who spoke highly of my musical talents (and later wrote to me acclaiming me as a leading composer)<sup>2</sup> never gave me a

<sup>1</sup> The italics are mine.

<sup>2</sup> This letter was published in my *Tirthankar* (Bengali translation of *Among the Great*.)



word of encouragement about my poetical utterances. So, naturally, after the first mediocre attempts I lost faith in my poetic potentialities. To me it was, indeed, a deep disappointment, because I was by nature vain and sensitive; but then I had my music to fall back on in which I had made my mark before I was out of my teens and to which I now applied myself with a redoubled ardour.

When I came to the Ashram I was told by Gurudev and the Mother that Yoga could assuredly achieve many a miracle, as for instance, it could help one develop overnight a perfect sense of rhythm. I was thrilled and kept praying to them that I might flower into a poet. Then I composed a few songs which were, indeed, better than my previous babblings, but still far from convincing. Thereafter I started translating Gurudev's poems, when "the miracle" happened (I cannot, alas, give it a lesser name—not even to propitiate the sceptic in me or the critical reader!) Besides, being by nature rather prone to truthfulness and self-confidence, I can never confess with grace to the conventional humility which, as I have often felt to my chagrin, puts a premium on telling falsehoods by wanting to be impeccably *comme il faut*. In a word, I have always attached much more importance to veracity than to the so-called humility which advocates the accepted etiquettes of a false flawlessness. With this much of apology I shall now drive straight to the point though I know I can only state but not prove what I have felt to be true, especially in the realm of what I can only call "the incredible which yet happened".



What I wish to imply by this is a perception, which burgeoned rather suddenly in me of a contact with my Daemon felt by me to be intimately connected with Sri Aurobindo. This feeling grew rapidly in strength subsequently, when Sri Aurobindo, while praising me as a "unique translator", actually wrote: "It was when you were translating my poems that you came into my light".

I grew sure, indeed, of this afterwards, but at the time I thought that the news was too good to be true as I have always been self-critical to a fault. So I posted a bunch of my poems to Tagore and requested him to tell me frankly what he thought of them. "Also, please, guide me once more in my poetic aspirations," I added, "and indicate the errors, if any, in my *chhanda* (rhythm and metre). I enclose Sri Aurobindo's opinion herewith."

(His estimate was contained in two letters. In the first he wrote: "It is again a beautiful poem you have written, but not better than the other.<sup>1</sup> But why erect mental theories and suit your poetry to them whether your father's or Tagore's? I would suggest to you not to be bound by either but to write as best suits your inspiration and poetic genius. Each of them wrote in the way suited to his own inspiration and substance; but it is the habit of the human mind to put one way forward as a general rule for all. You have developed an original poetic turn of your own, quite unlike

<sup>1</sup> Both the poems were published, later, in my book of poems entitled *Anami* which Tagore himself named and blessed with a beautiful poem. The two poems will be found on pp. 116 and 130 of *Anami*.

your father's and not by any means a reflection of Tagore's. Besides, there is now, as a result of your *sadhana*, a new quality in your work, *a power of expressing with great felicity a subtle psychic delicacy and depth of thought and emotion which I have not seen elsewhere in modern Bengali verse.* If you insist on being rigidly simple and direct as mental rule, you might spoil something of the subtlety of the expression, even if the delicacy of the substance remained. Obscurity, artifice, rhetoric have to be avoided, but for the rest follow the inner movement." (The italics are mine.)

In the other he wrote:

"Poetry can start from any plane of consciousness although like all art—or, one might say, all creation—it must come through the vital if it is to be alive. And as there is always a joy in creation, that joy along with a certain *enthousiasmos*—not enthusiasm, if you please, but *anandamaya avesh*—must always be there whatever the source. But your poetry differs from the lines you quote. Nishikanto writes from a purely vital inspiration; G—ditto, though he puts a vital feeling in the form of a passionate thought; B—in the lines you quote—from a rather light and superficial vital. Your inspiration, on the contrary, comes from the linking of the vital creative instrument to a deeper psychic experience, and it is that which makes the whole originality and peculiar individual power and subtle and delicate perfection of your poems. It was indeed because this linking-on took place that the true poetic faculty suddenly awoke in you; for it was not there before, at least on the surface. The joy you feel, therefore, was no doubt partly the simple joy of creation, but there

comes also into it the joy of expression of the psychic being which was seeking for an outlet since your boyhood. It is this that justifies your poetry-writing as a part of your *sadhana*.”)

Kind as ever, Tagore replied to me answering my pointed questions in due sequence till, towards the end, he commented on my Bengali poems thus:

“Now let me come to your poetry. The quantity you sent me at one sweep did give me a scare! Hitherto I have seen many of your writings which are supposed to belong to the category of verse. But they made me feel that you had missed your way to the heart of melody of our Bengali language, that you were a cripple in rhythm....

“But what is this? You seem to have acquired rhythm overnight! You have left me no scope to correct with a vengeance. How did you manage to train your ears? Now you have no cause to be diffident any more. But how a cripple can possibly dispense with his crutches one fine morning and start to run straight are what I find unfathomable deeps. At times I almost ask myself if you might not have had it all written by somebody else? But now that the Goddess *Saraswati* has touched your tongue with Her magic wand may you say your say in your newly-awakened language in your own native accent. And then what you have to say is pullulating fast and thick deep down in your core.”

I have quoted Tagore's letter because I fear that otherwise my readers may not be able to gauge the nature and sweep of the miracle that was achieved by Gurudev not only in me but in quite a few others including Chadwick. But to



come now to how he initiated me into English poetry where, naturally, he could help me even more with his Yogic Force.

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After I had mastered the Bengali metres in which I was by now regarded as one of the authorities (I wrote a book of prosody also whereupon many began to besiege me with questions about the intricacies of Bengali rhythm) I appealed to Gurudev to take me in hand and teach me English prosody including quantitative metres. It will be going beyond the scope of my reminiscences to go on relating how he taught me, at every step, and with what meticulous pains. But I am sure that a few instances of the poems he composed for my education will not only interest the general reader but be enjoyable as well to many a lover of English poetry, not to mention the young aspirants.

The first poem he composed for me, in five-foot iambics, he wrote as having "improvised for the occasion" (on 25-4-1934) in the note-book I used to send up to him daily. To explain to me how modulations are introduced he scanned it carefully for me thus:

All eye/has seen,/all that/the ear/has heard  
Is a pale/illu/sion, by/that great/er voice,  
That might/ier vi/sion. Not/the sweet/est bird  
Nor the/thrilled hues/that make/the heart/rejoice  
Can e/qual those/divi/ner ec/stasies.



He explained that in the first line there were two modulations: a spondee in the first foot and a trochee in the third; in the second line, an anapaest in the first foot and a pyrrhic in the third and so on.

I will give just one sample of how he corrected our English poems—not of mine alone but of Nirod, Romen, Nishikanta and others.

The first poem I wrote in English (in April, 1934) was a literal translation of a Bengali poem of mine:

The sorrow of Autumn woos the absent Spring;  
Chill winter hushes the cuckoo's vibrant grove;  
To the Lord of vernal sweetness now I sing:  
"Let streams of friendship swell to seas of love."

In his own handwriting he wrote on the margin:

"That is all right but the second line though metrically permissible is not very rhythmic. It would be better to write either 'Cold winter chills' or 'Winter has hushed'.

Next I wanted his guidance on how to write six-foot iambics (I quote from my thick note-book which I used to send up to him daily leaving a generous margin for his comments and corrections):

"O Guru," I abjured, "please give me now at least two lines in Alexandrines. In this metre I have translated two lines of a Bengali poem of mine in which in the second line I have put two spondees—in the first and third feet. I am athirst for your corrections."

"For the bird/to find/such a ski/ey rap/ture!" quoth/the Tree,  
"Earth-free/to seek/peace shel/ter in/the rest/less winds!"

He only substituted "said" for "quoth" and wrote: "Yes, that is good, but I shall send you some Alexandrines in which you can see a map of possibilities (not quite complete of course) without the use of any but an occasional anapaest." He wanted me to vary the pauses.

Next day he sent me the promised poem with this short explanatory preface (25-4-1934):

"I was writing for your edification a poem in Alexandrines, but as it is lengthening out, I send only a part of it, unrevised, so as not to keep you waiting."

He divided the lines differently, varying the caesura thus:

I walked beside the waters//of a world of light  
On a gold ridge//guarding two seats of high-rayed night.  
One was divinely topped//with a pale bluish moon  
And swam, as in a happy//deep spiritual swoon  
More conscious than earth's waking://the other's wide  
delight  
Billowed towards an ardent orb//of diamond white.  
But where I stood, there joined//in a bright marvellous haze  
The miracled moons//with the lone ridge's golden blaze.  
I knew not if two wakings//or two mighty sleeps  
Mixed the great diamond fires//and the pale pregnant deeps,  
But all my glad expanding soul//flowed satisfied  
Around me and became//the mystery of their tide.

As one who finds his own eternal self, // content,  
Needing naught else // beneath the spirit's firmament,  
It knew not Space, // it heard no more Time's running feet,  
Termless, fulfilled, // lost richly in itself, complete.  
And so it might have been for ever // but there came  
A dire intrusion // wrapped in married cloud and flame,  
Across the blue-white moon-hush // of my magic seas  
A sudden sweeping // of immense peripheries  
Of darkness ringing lambent lustres; // shadowy-vast  
A nameless dread, // a Power incalculable passed  
Whose feet were death, // whose wings were immortality;  
Its changing mind was time, // its heart eternity.  
All opposites were there, // unreconciled, unceased,  
Struggling for victory, // by victory unappeased.  
All things it bore, // even that which brings undying peace,  
But secret, veiled, // waiting for some supreme release.  
I saw the spirit // of the cosmic Ignorance;  
I felt the power besiege // my gloried fields of trance.

At the end he explained:

"Some of these can be differently divided, not the way I have done; it depends much on how one wants to read it. But the main thing is that there can be a variation of even or uneven divisions (of the syllables); the even ones have three varieties, 4-8, 6-6, 8-4; the uneven ones may be 5-7, 7-5, 9-3, or even 3-9. The division may be made by the caesura of a foot, a pause in the sentence or a pause of the voice. If there is a succession of similar lines (4-8, 6-6, 8-4 are always tending to come), then great care must be

taken to bring in minor variations so that there may be no sheer monotone.

"This, by the way, is my own theory of the Alexandrine evolved at need. I don't know if it agrees with any current prosody. Perhaps there is not a fixed prosodic theory as the Alexandrine has been left very much in the cold, not having been adopted by any of the great writers."

Next day I wrote to him:

"I am grateful—especially for the caesuras you have indicated. I find you have used the caesura dividing the twelve syllables in all sorts of ways, e.g. 2-10, 4-8, 6-6, 8-4, 10-2, even 5-7, 7-5, and 9-3. The only omission is 3-9, please send me one line to fill up the gap."

He wrote on the margin:

And in the silence of the mind//life knows itself  
Immortal,//and immaculately grows divine.

I need not go further into all he discussed with me about English metres and modulations and his comments on the quantitative metres in English—a discussion, besides, too technical to be enjoyable to those who have not made a special study of such subtleties. But just to give an idea, (hoping always that it may be of interest to a few at least) here is a stray sample:

I asked him about what is meant by caesura in English I quoted Voltaire's definition: "*la césure rompt le vers partout où elle coupe la phrase.*"

"*Tiens, le voilà, marchons, il est à nous, viens, frappe.*"



"From this example given by Voltaire," I wrote, "does it not seem that he takes caesura to mean every pause of the kind indicated by a comma? But that is not, I gather, what is meant by caesura in English prosody? Please enlighten."

To that he wrote in my note-book:

"Voltaire's dictum is quite baffling, unless he means by caesura any pause or break in the line; then of course a comma does create such a break or pause. But ordinarily caesura is a technical term meaning a rhythmical (not necessarily a metrical) division of a line in two parts equal or unequal, in the middle or near the middle, that is, just a little before or just a little after. I think, in my account of my Alexandrines I myself used the word caesura in the sense of a pause anywhere which breaks the line in two equal or unequal parts, but usually such a break very near the beginning or end of a line would not be counted as an orthodox caesura. In French there are two metres which insist on a caesura—the Alexandrine and the pentameter. The Alexandrine always takes the caesura in the middle of the line, that is after the sixth *sonnant* syllable, the pentameter always after the fourth, there is no need for any comma there, e.g. Alexandrine:

Ce que dit l'aube//et la flamme à la flamme

"This is the position and all the Voltaires in the world cannot make it otherwise. I don't know about the modernists however, perhaps they have broken this rule like every other.

"As for caesura in English I don't know much about it

in theory, only in the practice of the pentameter decasyllabic and hexameter verses. In the blank verse decasyllabic I would count it as a rule for variability of rhythm to make the caesura at the fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh syllable, e. g. from Milton:

(1)

For who would lose  
Though full of pain,/this intellectual being, (4th)  
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,  
To perish rather,/swallow'd up and lost? (5th)

(2)

Here we may reign secure;/and in my choice (6th)  
To reign is worth ambition,/though in hell; (7th)  
Better to reign in hell than serve in Heaven.

Or from Shakespeare:

(1)

Sees Helen's beauty/in a brow of Egypt (5th)

(2)

To be or not to be,/that is the question (6th)

But I don't know whether your prosodist would agree to all that. As for the hexameter, the Latin classical rule is to make the caesura either at the middle of the third or the middle of the fourth foot: e.g. (you need not bother about the Latin words but follow the scansion only):

## (1)

Quadrupē/dante pu/tream//cur/su quatit/ungula/campum.

(Virgil)

Horse-hooves/trampled the/crumbling/plain/with a/four-footed gallop.

## (2)

O pass/i gravi/ora, //dab/it deus/his quoque/finem. (Virgil)

Fiercer/griefs you have/suffered; //to/these too/God will give/ending.

## (3)

Nec fa/cundia/deseret/hunc//nec/lucidus/ordo (Horace)

Him shall not/copious/eloquence/leave//nor/clearness and/order.

"In the first example, the caesura comes at the third foot; in the second example, it comes at the third foot but note that it is a trochaic caesura; in the third example the caesura comes at the fourth foot. In the English hexameter you can follow that or you may take greater liberties.

I have myself cut the hexameter sometimes at the end of the third foot and not in the middle, e.g.

(1)

Opaline/rhythm of/towers, // notes of the/lyre of the/Sun  
God...

(2)

Even the/ramparts/felt her, // stones that the/Gods had  
e/rected...

and there are other combinations possible which can give a great variety to the run of the line as if standing balanced between one place of caesura and another."

At the time I was transposing some English modulations into our Bengali verse which he greatly appreciated in so much that, to encourage me, he composed short poems now and then as English counterparts to my Bengali bases. Then I asked Nishikanta also to help. As he complied we both besieged him, literally, with our poems day after delightful day. Once Nishikanta wrote a poem in Bengali with an anapaestic movement in the first line followed by dactyls in the next three lines:

UU—/UU—/UU—/UU—/UU—/  
—UU/—  
—UU/—  
—UU/—UU/—UU/—UU/—<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The sign U stands for a short syllable, —stands for a long.



I wrote to him as I sent up this poem:

"It is melodious, you will admit, if somewhat unorthodox in its modulations."

At once he sent me back two poems and wrote:

\*Dilip,

Here is your stanza:

"To the hill-tops of silence from over the infinite sea,  
     Golden he came,  
     Armed with the flame,  
 Looked on the world that his greatness and passion must free.

"Or you can have another, colourful you will admit, if highly unscientific:

Oh, but fair was her face as she lolled in her green-tinted robe.

Emerald trees.

Sapphire seas.

Sun-ring and moon-ring that glittered and hung in each lobe.

Nishikanta wrote another in Bengali:

UU—/UU—/UU—/UU—/

—UU—

—UU—

—UU/—UU/—

Sri Aurobindo wrote back to me:

"As for Nishikanta's model I give you two stanzas also

In the ending of time, in the sinking of space  
 What shall survive?  
 Hearts once alive,  
 Beauty and charm of a face?  
 Nay, these shall be safe in the breast of the One,  
 Man deified,  
 World-spirits wide,  
 Nothing ends all but began."

Nishikanta wrote in Bengali: .

UU / — — /  
 UU / — — /  
 UU — / UU — /  
 UU — / UU — /  
 UU — / UU — / UU — /

"These are not very manageable metres in English,"  
 he wrote back, "but all the same here you are:

In some/faint dawn,  
 In some/dim eve,  
 Like a ges/ture of Light,  
 Like a dream/of delight  
 Thou comst near/er and near/er to me.

Next I sent up a poem in which the third paeon alternated with molossus (published later in my *Suryamukhi*, page 338) thus:

UU — U / UU — U /  
— — — /

He answered by composing:

In a flaming/as of spaces  
Curved like spires,  
An epipha/ny of faces  
Long curled fires,  
The illumined/and tremendous  
Masque drew near,  
A God-pageant/of the aeons  
Vast, deep-hued,  
And the thunder/of the aeons  
Wide-winged/, nude,  
In their harmo/ny stupendous  
Smote earth's ears.

Then I wrote a poem thus:

U — / U — / UU / U — / UU — /  
U — / U — / UU / U — / UU — —  
U — /  
— — / U — / U — — /  
— — / U — / U — — /  
U — /

and so on.

He wrote: "After all, I got some lines:

O life,/thy breath/is but/a cry/to the Light  
 Immor/tal out/of which/has sprung/thy delight,  
     Thy grasp.  
 All things/in vain/thy hands seize,  
 Earth's mu/sic fails;/the notes cease  
     Or rasp,  
 Aloud/thou call'st/to blind Fate:  
 'Remove/the bar,/the gold gate  
     Unhasp.  
 But nev/er yet/hast thou/the goal/of thy race  
 Attained,/nor thrilled/to the/inef/fable Face  
     And clasp.

I wrote then a poem in Bengali thus (published later in *Suryamukhi*, p. 332)

— U — / — — / U U / — U —

Sri Aurobindo composed a long poem on it which was published later in his *Collected Poems* (Vol. II, p. 300,) entitled "Thought the Paraclete." So I need not quote it here in full: the first two lines will suffice as illustration:

As some bright/arch-an/gel in/vision flies  
 Plunged in dream/-caught spi/rit im/mensities....

Then I wrote a poem in Bengali thus:





Winged with/dangerous/deity,  
Passion/swift and im/placable  
    Arose/and storm/-footed  
    In the dim/heart of him  
Ran insatiate,/conquering,  
Worlds de/vouring and/heart of men  
    Then pe/rished bro/ken by  
    The irre/sistible  
Occult/masters of/destiny,  
They who/sit in the/secrecy  
    And watch/unmoved/ever  
    Unto the/end of all."

The last metre I sent him in Bengali I shall not quote at length, as it is too complicated and technical. I shall only quote his answering poem which he sent back with this preface:

"I have struggled with your yesterday's poser and after a stupendous effort almost conquered—not altogether, for the first paeon at the end of a line was too much for me: I had to change it into a choriamb (trochee-iamb) ....Moreover, my first attempt to do the thing in rhymed verse was a failure, not from the point of view of metre but from that of rhythm and poetic quality; it simply fell heavy and flat. So I have made it an unrhymed verse which can be taken as a continuation of the three stanzas in the Arnold or Greek chorus style: 'Winged with dangerous deity'. A change of metre of this kind would be quite permissible in this style, if done at regular intervals. These stanzas run thus:

Outspread a/wave-burst, a/Force leaped from /the Unseen,  
 Vague, wide, some/veiled maker,/masked Lighter/of the Fire  
 With dire blows the/Smith of the World/  
 Forged strength from/hearts of the weak;/  
 Earth's hate the/edge of the axe,/   
 Smitten/by the Gods,/   
 Hewn, felled, the/Form crashed that/touched Heaven/and  
 its stars."

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I have often wondered why he spent so much of his precious time to help us even in our poetic experimentations when much more seemingly important things were crying for his attention in vain! To quote a random instance: When the Golden Book of Tagore was being compiled, Sri Pramatha Choudhuri wrote to me urgent letters to induce Gurudev to contribute something. But Gurudev wrote back to me (in 1931):

"I am afraid Pramatha Choudhuri is asking from me a thing psychologically impossible. You know that I have forbidden myself to write anything for publication for some time past and some time to come. I am self-debarred from the press, platform and public. Even if it were otherwise, it would be impossible, under present circumstances, to write at a week's notice. You will present him my excuses in your best and most tactful manner."

But Sri Pramatha Choudhuri would not listen and importuned again: "Tagore's Godken Book will be incomplete without Sri Aurobindo's tribute. Even a message of two

lines or a couplet coming from him will be looked upon as a boon of his Grace"—etc.

But Sri Aurobindo's Grace was not like Caesar's, amenable to flattery.

"I take Pramatha Choudhuri's remark—that Tagore's Golden Book will be incomplete without my contribution—as a complimentary hyperbole. The Golden Book will be as golden and Tagore's work and fame as solid without any lucubration from me to gild the one or buttress the other."

But when he found it "impossible" to find even a few minutes for such an important work—for Tagore was then at the peak of his fame—he not only went on encouraging the poems of such as we but went on actually correcting our English verses—and with what meticulous pains! I myself have written more than six hundred pages of English verse and produced at least two thousand pages in Bengali, and he not only found time to read *all* these carefully but to comment on most of them as well as throw out suggestions for improvement. Nevertheless, when he was asked to write for a poet of the stature of Tagore he declined firmly and obstinately. I cannot possibly wish to insinuate that he felt no sympathy with him and others on whose behalf he was often asked to write tributes from time to time. For his was a spirit that reminded one often of A.E.'s quatrain:

When the spirit grows wide  
It will have not have less  
Than the whole of the world  
For its tenderness.



Yes, "tenderness" is the *mot juste*. For once when I wrote to him that Tagore had recently—in a letter to me published in my *Anami*—recanted his faith in the Divine, having been overwhelmed by the modern craze for Humanity with a big H, he asked me almost with a motherly solicitude not to criticize Tagore adversely for his *volte face*.

"I do not think," he wrote, "that we should hastily conclude that Tagore's passing over to the opposite camp is a certitude. He is sensitive and perhaps a little affected by the positive, robustious, slogan-fed practicality of the day—he has passed through Italy and Persia and was fêted there. But I don't see how he can turn his back on all the ideas of a lifetime. After all, he has been a wayfarer towards the same goal as ours in his own way—that is the main thing, the exact stage of advance and putting of the steps are minor matters. I hope there will be no attack on him. Besides, he has had a long and brilliant day—I should like him to have as peaceful and undisturbed a sunset as may be. His exact position as a poet or a prophet or anything else will be assigned by posterity and we need not be in haste to anticipate the final verdict. The immediate verdict after his departure or soon after it may very well be a rough one, for this is a generation that seems to take delight in trampling with an almost Nazi rudeness on the bodies of the ancestors, especially the immediate ancestors. I have read with an interested surprise that Napoleon was only a bustling and self-important nincompoop all of whose great achievements were done by others; that Shakespeare was 'no great shakes' and that most other great men were by no means

so great as the stupid respect and reverence of past ignorant ages made them out to be! What chance has then Tagore? But these injustices of the moment do not endure—in the end a wise and fair estimate is formed and survives the changes of time.

“As for your question, Tagore of course belonged to an age which had faith in its ideas and whose very denials were creative affirmations. That makes an immense difference. Your strictures on his later development (about turning away from the Divine to Democracy) may or may not be correct, but even this mixture was the note of the day and it expressed a tangible hope of a fusion into something new and true—therefore it could create. Now all that idealism has been smashed to pieces by the immense adverse event and everybody is busy exposing its weaknesses—but nobody knows what to put in its place. A mixture of scepticism and slogans, ‘Heil-Hitler’ and the Fascist Salute and Five-year-plan and the beating of everybody into one amorphous shape, a disabused denial of all ideals on one side and on the other a blind shut-my-eyes-and-shut-everybody’s-eyes plunge into the bog in the hope of finding some firm foundation there will not carry us very far. And what else is there? Until new spiritual values are discovered no great enduring creation is possible.”

He always insisted that we follow our own line—express such spiritual perceptions, psychic emotions and truths as the soul visions on its way towards the Light which he had invoked by his superhuman *sadhana*. He used often to tell us that psychic poetry (that is, poetry inspired by the psychic

emotion) was rare on earth and therefore when Tagore once wrote to me that one must write verses of all kinds to be a great poet he disagreed and reminded me that we had not come here to become great in anything but only to realise the Divine and be His humble instruments on earth. For this the psychic being must be brought to the fore, he emphasised. And the reason why he encouraged me to write poetry was revealed in one of his letters to me:

"When you write your poetry the psychic being is always behind it—even when you are in the depths of mental and vital despondency, as soon as you write the psychic being intervenes and throws its self-expression into what you write. It is that which makes people with some inner life in them, those who have some touch of the spiritual, feel these poems of yours so much."

Such judgments of his were often challenged by many, but words such as "many", "multitude" or "majority" never had any terrors for him. On the one hand he was the softest and the most tolerant of appraisers; on the other, the whole world could not make him swerve an inch from the path once he had decided to tread it as the way to his Goal. That is why once he fell like a ton of bricks on Nirod. As it is germane to my theme I shall quote the correspondence which passed between them in 1935.

"For creation and effective expression, Sir," wrote Nirod, "style is very important. 'Le style—c'est l'homme', as they say. And to acquire an effective style one must read and read and read. For instance, you can't deny that your style



which is incomparable was manufactured partly by your enormous reading?"

"I agree," he answered, "that without style there is no literature except in fiction where a man with a bad style like Dickens or Balzac can make up by vigour and power of his substance. But I cannot agree with you that I manufactured my style laboriously; style with any life in it cannot be manufactured. It is born and grows like any other living thing. Of course mine was fed on my reading which was not enormous—there are people in India who have read a hundred times as much as I have, only I have made much out of that little. For the rest, it is Yoga that has developed my style by the development of consciousness, fineness and accuracy of thought and vision, increasing inspiration and an increasing intuition, discrimination (self-critical) of right thought, word-form and just image and figure."

But Nirod seldom yielded without a brave tussle.

"Methinks", he wrote ironically, "you are making just a little too much of Yogic Force. Its potency as regards matters spiritual is undeniable; but as for art, can one possibly be as sure? Take Dilip's case. Might one not say: Why posit an extraneous Force? Had he been so assiduous, sincere and earnest in his literary efforts anywhere else, he would have succeeded just as convincingly."

"Will you explain to me," Gurudev retorted, "how Dilip who could not write a single good poem and had no power over rhythm and metre before he came here, suddenly, not after long 'assiduous efforts,' blossomed into a poet, rhythmist and metrist after he came here? Why was Tagore



dumbfounded by a lame man throwing away his crutches and running freely and surely on the path of rhythm? And then why was it that I who had never understood or cared for painting, suddenly, in a single hour, by an opening of vision got the eye to see and the mind of understanding about colour, line and design? How was it that I who had been unable to understand and follow a metaphysical argument and whom a page of Kant or Hume or even Berkeley used to leave either dazed and uncomprehending and fatigued or totally uninterested, suddenly began to write pages of the stuff as soon as I started the *Arya* and am now reputed to be a great philosopher? How is it that at a time when I felt it difficult to produce more than a paragraph of prose from time to time and more than a mere poem short and laboured, perhaps one in two months, suddenly, after concentrating and practising *pranayam* daily, began to write pages and pages in a single day and kept sufficient faculty to edit a big daily paper and afterwards to write 60 pages of philosophy every month? Kindly reflect a little and don't talk facile nonsense. Even if a thing can be done in a moment or a few days by Yoga which would ordinarily take a long, assiduous, sincere and earnest cultivation, that would of itself show the power of the Yoga-force. But a faculty that did not exist appears quickly and spontaneously or impotence changes into the highest potency, or an obstructed talent with equal rapidity into fluent and facile sovereignty. If you deny that evidence, no evidence will convince you because you are determined to think otherwise."

"But, Sir," pursued Nirod, still unconvinced, "my grey matter does not open at once. So it is difficult for me to understand how far the Yogic Force has been responsible without any assiduous, sincere and earnest endeavour on your part for the perfection of your style."

"It may be difficult for you to understand," came the retort, "but it is not difficult for me since I have followed my own evolution from stage to stage with a perfect vigilance and following of the process. I have made no endeavour in writing. I have simply left the Higher Power to work and when it did not work, I made no effort at all. It was in the old intellectual days that I had sometimes tried to force things and not after I started development of poetry and prose by Yoga. Let me remind you also that when I was writing the *Arya* and also whenever I write these letters or replies, I never think or seek for expression or try to write in the grand style; it is out of a silent mind that I write whatever comes ready-shaped from above. Even when I correct it is because the correction comes in the same way. Where then is the place for even a slight endeavour or any room at all for 'my great endeavours'? Well?

"By the way, please try to understand that the supra-intellectual (not the Supramental only) is the field of a spontaneous and automatic action. To get it or to get yourself open to it needs effort, but once it acts there is no effort; it closes up also too easily, so each time an effort has to be made again—perhaps too much effort—if your grey matter would sensibly accommodate itself to the automatic flow, there would not be the difficulty and the need

of such 'assiduous, sincere and earnest endeavour' each time, methinks. Well?"

"I only venture, Sir," pleaded Nirod, unvanquished still, "that the Yogic-Force could be more effective in its own field, to wit, in the spiritual not literary, which is mental."

"But no," countered Gurudev, "I challenge your assertion that the Force is more easily potent to produce spiritual than mental (literary) results. It seems to me the other way round. In my own case, the first time I started Yoga, *pranayam* etc., I laboured five hours a day for a long time and concentrated and struggled for five years without the least spiritual result, (when spiritual experiences did come, they were as unaccountable and automatic as—blazes) but poetry came like a river and prose like a flood and other things too that were mental, vital or physical, not spiritual richnesses or openings. I have seen in many cases an activity of the mind in various directions as the first or at least an early result. Why? Because there is less resistance, more cooperation from the confounded lower members for these things than for a psychic or a spiritual change. That is easy to understand at least. Well?"

I have quoted his unliterary and personal letters (letters which he probably would not have allowed to be published had he been with us today) to emphasise where he differed from the accepted view of things. For in such letters where he seems to be perfectly at his ease—with no *arrière pensée* of any kind—his outlook on life and things comes out in a way which almost bewilders us for the simple reason that we who have learned to live all along in our surface con-

sciousness have thereby forfeited our birthright to the inner view, so native to the Yogi. That is why we find a deal too much of head-shaking when men live in and act from a deeper consciousness and talk to us of values which our superficial consciousness cannot appraise. Not for nothing did the First Creator, Brahma, warn the First Sage, Narada:

The sages whose hearts and senses are delivered  
From the yoke of passions—know the Mystic Lore:  
But when the wordy storms again come surging  
The sensitive light of Truth withdraws once more.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> *Rishe vidanti munayah prashāntātmendriyāśayah  
Yadā tadevasattarkais-tirodhiyeta viplutam.* (The Bhagavat, 2.6.40)



## CHAPTER XI

### AVOWEDLY PERSONAL

IN Chapter VIII the closing stress was on Sri Aurobindo's vision of earth as the final venue of heroic souls who are sent to carry through a great experiment because this earth has been chosen as "the forge where the Arch-mason shapes His works." This experiment has a twofold movement: first, the aspiration of the animality of man after Divinity and secondly, the invocation of the answering Divinity in order to transform the seemingly ineradicable animality which has been the despair of idealists. That is why Sri Aurobindo speaks so emphatically of the Descent of the Divine Power into our dismal humanity, a descent ever increasing with the realization of the Ascent and missioned to promote a new manifestation in the "earth-consciousness."

But to invoke the Divine Power for the bitter lot of earth and man is one thing, to apply the power to alleviate the "misery" of man is quite another. How hard this task is in practice is difficult for such as we to realise because, among other things, we have little knowledge of occult powers and even less clue to their right utilisation when such powers are given us, as they occasionally are, before we have acquired some insight into the mysterious springs of human nature and action. Sri Aurobindo gave me a pregnant hint of

this deep difficulty in 1924, when he said that he had come to realise through his Yogic knowledge that "to help humanity out it was not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually" because "even when the Light is ready to descend it cannot come to stay till the lower plane is also ready to bear the pressure of the Descent...consequently the utmost you can do, here and now, is to communicate only partially the light of your realisation in proportion as people are receptive."<sup>1</sup>

But what I had understood him to mean then proved very different from what, little by little, I came to realize afterwards. Often enough a saying of Sri Ramakrishna recurred to me as my ideas changed under the pressure of what was borne home to me through my seemingly endless struggles. Sri Ramakrishna once said: "What I had conceived about *sadhana* corresponded little with my subsequent experience of it." No one, I am afraid, who has not practised Yoga can possibly grasp the complex implications of this simple statement. I will not, however, venture to enlarge on these because, for one thing, I do not feel myself competent and, for another, this is not a treatise on Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. I have only undertaken to pay my homage to my Master's great personality through my own reactions and clashes. So I will, to be on the safe side, confine myself to his personality as it impressed me from day to day.

As I lived in his Ashram and, much to my shame, tussled with him in my pathetic ignorance which made me rush

<sup>1</sup> *Among the Great* (American edition) P. 219-20

in again and again where much greater beings than I feared to tread, I felt a great load increasing on my consciousness, as it were. To think that I knew so little—less than nothing at all—in spite of the beautiful opinion I had formed of my beautiful knowledge of men and things and truth in general! But he did all he could to make the burden of my self-pity bearable because he was what he was, and not because I was anything near what he wanted me to be. And what was it after all that he had wanted of me? A very simple thing: to grow in trust and come to have a working faith in his superior wisdom, his verifiable power of helping me in my helplessness and his unfailing indulgence for one who had failed him at every turn. I do not say this in mere (so-called) humility. For as the days passed I came to realise increasingly, how much I had been found wanting when weighed in the balance. For did I not, even after accepting his radiant lead, desire him (sometimes unwittingly, at others perversely!) to lead me in the way I thought proper? In other words, did I not presume, time and time again, to give him a lead, as it were, as to how I should be led and to offer guidance about how I was to be guided? I am not trying to be clever. I want only to steer clear of platitudes and focus the limited light of my vision on his personality that I may bring out the only thing I can: his greatness as I saw it from close quarters and perhaps appraise it better by failing to plumb it. For day after heart-shattering day I saw how I was petering out, even though the more restive I grew the more patiently he gave me a long rope. He did this not to force the balm of his wisdom on my unruly ego



but to show me the way to my own higher nature which the thunder-storms of my boisterous self-will blurred so effectively from my "rational eyes", as I put it self-appreciatively. Month after weary month I challenged him to prove his thesis which I knew in my heart of hearts to be true and yet, curiously, I insisted on flinging a deeper defiance every time he leaned down to accord me a kinder hand-clasp. I aimed at him my crude gibes but he came down unperturbed to my level and met me with his smiling repartees. I doubted him but he blessed me in return. I resisted him but he only lullabied to sleep the Old Adam in me. I challenged him to 'prove' his axioms—a thing I had not dared even when I was learning such an elementary thing as Euclidean geometry—and yet he came out invariably with his patient arguments substantiating the validity of his reasonings from diverse angles. Those who, in their strong ignorance, castigate the dogmatism of spiritual teachers may appear very sweetly undogmatic to the uninformed, but those who have even once come into contact with an authentic Guru can only testify to his overwhelming tolerance.

But what I wish to stress here is not simply his tolerance and patience, nor even his peerless capacity for understanding the rebel's point of view, but a gift, amounting to genius, of appraising in imaginative sympathy the latter's position as a questioning seeker and then coming down to his level of intelligence and receptivity. To give an instance in point:

I had come to the Ashram with a strong mental forma-



tion in favour of asceticism. So even though I loved *karma*—being, by nature, ineradicably *rajasic*—I wanted to debouch into inaction of the *sattwic* type, to shine as a living example of inaction, *bhakti* and wisdom. I was told by a *gurubhai* that the Mother favoured a dynamic spirituality and *karma* as against static wisdom. This made me at once glad and sad. Glad because I was by nature energetic; sad because I feared that *karma* would tether me irrevocably to the world and therefore, *a fortiori*, to my present state of non-experience as against transcendent God-realisation. Yet why must he go on browbeating Nirod, the charming pessimist, with his Aurobindonian gospel of incessant *karma* to the exclusion of *jnana* and inveigh against those who, like Dilip, loved the traditional thoroughfare of *bhakti* which at least led somewhere? Did not even the great Sri Ramakrishna warn the spiritual aspirant against being caught in the toils of *karma* when he gave the simile of the wife carrying a child, saying that the nearer she draws to her confinement the lighter is made the load of her work till, when the child is born, she has only to live for the child to the exclusion of everything else? (*Karma* here means action, works).

As I waxed eloquent over the bliss of inaction, often enough I went too far: my impulse landed me in an anti-climax and I looked like a disciple who wanted to give points to his Guru. No wonder my brief glow of questioning and challenging left me only a legacy of brooding sadness if not an aftermath of despondent depression. Could it be right to take such liberties with one's Guru

(and what a Guru!) because he tolerated them? And was it seemly to assume such a tone of banter if not irreverence, treating him as though he were something like an honourable colleague in the Parliament of Words—a fellow-member in opposition whom one could address with polite reverence only to show up the more effectively his deficiency in acumen? So I apologised in a postscript: wouldn't he pardon my unpardonable temerity? For if he got displeased with me, where would I be? And then wasn't I at least an energetic worker in practice though an opponent of works in idealistic theory—etc?

To that he wrote, indulgent as ever (1934):

"I do not understand why you should assume that I am displeased with the *karma* question. I castigated or fustigated Nirod not from displeasure nor even 'more in sorrow than in anger', but for fun and also from a high sense of duty: for that erring mortal was bold enough to generalise from his very limited experience and impose it as a definite law in Yoga, discrediting in the process my own immortal philosophy! What then could I do but to jump on him in a spirit of genial massacre?"

Nirod used to come almost daily in those days as we two happened to be birds of the same shade of pessimistic feather. Thus while roosting together, we two drowned, our world-disapproval many a time in our morning jeremiads over the tea. So we chuckled at this point, albeit, alas, a little too prematurely!

"I am afraid," Sri Aurobindo went on to add, "you

letter too does very much the same thing. For in spite of your disclaimer, you practically, come to the conclusion that all my nonsense about integral Yoga and *karma* being as much a way to realisation as *jnana* and *bhakti* is either a gleaming chimera or practicable only by Avatars or else a sheer laborious superfluity—since one can jump straight into the Divine through the open door of *bhakti* or sweep majestically into Him by the easy road of meditation, so why this scramble through the jungle of *karma* by which nobody reached anywhere? The old Yogas are true, are they not? Then why a new-fangled and more difficult one with this unheard-of talk about Supramental and God knows what else? There can be no answer to that; for I can only answer by a repetition of the statement of my own knowledge and experience. That is what I have done in my today's answer to Nirod and perhaps that amounts only to a perverse obstinacy in riding my gleaming and dazzling chimera and forcing my nuisance of a superfluity on a world weary of itself and anxious to get an easy short cut to the Divine. Unfortunately, *I do not believe in short cuts*—at any rate none ever led me where I wanted to go. However, let it rest there.

"I have never disputed the truth of the old Yogas—I have myself had the experience of Vaishnava *bhakti* or of *nirvana*, I recognise their truth in their own field and for their own purpose—the truth of their experience so far as it goes—though I am in no way bound to accept the truth of the mental philosophies founded on the experience. I similarly find that my Yoga is true in its own field—a



larger field, as I think—and for its own purpose. The purpose of the old is to get away from life to the Divine—so obviously, let us drop *karma*. The purpose of the new is to reach the Divine and bring fullness of what is gained *into* life—for that, the Yoga by works is indispensable. It seems to me that there is no mystery about that or anything to perplex anybody—it is rational and inevitable. Only you say that the thing is impossible; but that is what is said about everything before it is done.

“I may point out, however, that *karmayoga* existed even before the Gita. Your idea that the only justification in the Gita for works is that it is an unavoidable nuisance, so better make the best use of it, is rather summary and crude. If that were all, the Gita would be the production of an imbecile and I would hardly have been justified in writing two volumes on it or the world in reading it as one of the greatest scriptures, especially for its treatment of the place of works in spiritual endeavour. There is surely more in it than that. Anyhow, whether works can lead to realisation—or rather, your flat and sweeping denial of the possibility—contradicts the experience of those who have achieved this supposed impossibility. You say that work lowers the consciousness, brings you out of the inner into the outer, —yes, if you consent to externalise yourself in it instead of doing works from within; but that is just what one has to learn not to do. For that matter, thought and feeling also can externalise one in the same way; but it is a question of linking thought, feeling and act firmly to the inner consciousness by living there and making the rest an instrument.



Difficult? Even *bhakti* is not easy and *nirvana*, for most men, is more difficult than that.

"You again try to floor me with Ramakrishna. But something puzzles me, as Shankara's stupendous activity of *karma* puzzles me in the apostle of inaction!—you see you are not the only puzzled person in the world. Ramakrishna also gave the image of the jar which ceased gurgling when it was full. Well, but Ramakrishna spent the last few years of his life in talking about the Divine and receiving disciples—was that not action, not work? Did Ramakrishna become a half-full jar after being a full one or was he never full? Did he get far away from God and so begin work? Or had he reached a condition in which he was bound neither to *rajasic* work and mental prattling nor to inactivity and silence, but could do, from the divine realisation, the divine works and speak, from the inner consciousness, of the divine world? If the last, then perhaps, in spite of the dictum, his example at least is rather in my favour.

"I do not know why you drag in humanitarianism, Subhas's activism, philanthropical service, etc. None of these are part of my Yoga or in harmony with my works, so they do not touch me. I never thought that the Congress politics or feeding the poor or writing beautiful poems would lead straight to Vaikuntha or the Absolute. If it were so, Romesh Dutt on one side and Baudelaire on the other would be the first to attain the highest and welcome us there. It is not the form of the work itself or mere activity but the consciousness and Godward will behind it that are the essence of *karma yoga*; the work is only the necessary instrumentation

for the union with the Master of works, the transit to the pure will and power of Light from the will and power of the Ignorance.

"Finally, why suppose that I am against meditation or *bhakti*? I have not the slightest objection to your taking either or both as the means of approach to the Divine. Only I saw no reason why anyone should fall foul of works and deny the testimony of those who, as the Gita says, reached through works perfect realisation and oneness of nature with the Divine—*samsiddhim sadharmyam* (as did Janaka and others)—simply because he himself cannot find or has not found their deeper secret; hence my defence of works."

His indulgence emboldened me. But paradoxical though it may sound, I myself loved *karma* for its own sake, and yet often found my mind championing quietism when he emphasised activism, knowing all the time that *his* brand of activism was very different from ours, that is, the accepted variety. Thus, in the present instance, just when I felt his greatness most, I was conscious of a division in me and then and there I penned a long letter to him attempting in my inept way to rail at his theory about *karma*. I wrote that I was delighted that he had lifted the ban on *bhakti*; that I was indeed thankful for small mercies; that he confounded us beautifully with his paradoxes—wasn't that why he wrote about his being "puzzled"? and so on. I went on then to ask him if it were really possible to refer all our works to the Divine. I reminded him once more that though I had tried to "remember" Krishna while I worked, I found that

I failed utterly in the attempt for more than a few minutes at a time because I got quickly absorbed in whatever I undertook. So I had come in the end to ask myself if "offering one's works" could prove a practical proposition. In short, *bhakti* and *jnana*, I contended, meant business whereas *karma* left one high and dry in no-man's land because the moment it became interesting, it took entire possession of the mind and therefore could not be offered to the Divine. As I wrote on, the Old Adam in me got out of hand, as it often did in such critical times, and I waxed eloquent over my "realistic pessimism": true, I was turning out some fine poetry with an astonishing facility and composing lovely tunes which seemed to drop on me from above like manna; but, so I argued in my wrong mood, wasn't it somewhat irrelevant to the seeking which had made me leave everything and come here? In other words, I asserted, although such things of beauty might be joys for ever, yet the stark fact remained that no artistic joy, however longlived, could win one a passport to the last Olympus of salvation. To put it more succinctly, through works none had so far arrived, while through *bhakti* and *jnana* at least a brilliant galaxy had achieved an exit. So why on earth must one stick to the mantra: *Yat karomi Jagannāstadeva tava pujanam* (whatever I do, O World-Mother, is an oblation to thee!)? Lastly, I asked him whether his new-fangled Integral Yoga could really succeed with anyone who was not congenitally a Hercules? "*Nayamatma valahinena labhyah*" said the Upanishad. But, if "none but the strong deserved the fair Soul's favours", what hope was there for the likes



of us who could not claim the strength of a Ramakrishna, a Ramana Maharshi or a Vivekananda? Thus I went on blowing my bubble of sorrow, inveigled by its phantom iridescence.

But this time he did not choose to meet my banter with banter and wrote back in high if not stern seriousness:

"I must again point out that I have never put any ban on *bhakti*, so there is no meaning in your saying that I have lifted a ban which never existed. Also I am not conscious of having banned meditation either at any time—so the satirical praise of my mercifulness is out of place. I imagine I have stressed both *bhakti* and knowledge in my Yoga as well as works, even if I have not given to any of them exclusive importance like Shankara or Chaitanya. Also I think I have not imposed my own choice unduly upon anyone in the matter of *sadhana*. Those who wanted to go wholesale for meditation, I have left to do so without any interference, though not without any help I could give. I have latterly sometimes discounselled entire retirement, but that was because I did not want a repetition of the cases of N and others who, in spite of my warnings, went in for it and came to grief. I have written what I thought when people asked me; but if they have no use for my ideas about things, why do they ask me?

"My remarks about being puzzled were, by the way, mere Socratic irony. Of course I am not in the least puzzled by the case either of Shankara or of Ramakrishna.

"The difficulty you feel or any *sadhaka* feels about *sadhana* is not really a question of meditation versus *bhakti*



versus works, it is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you call it. Yours seems to be characterised on one side by a tremendous effort in the mind, on the other a gloomy certitude in the vital which seems to watch and mutter under the breath if not aloud: 'Yes, yes, go ahead, my fine fellow, but—it will come to nothing,' and then at the end of meditation: 'What did I tell you, hasn't it come to nothing?' A vital so ready to despair that even after a 'glorious' flood of poetry it uses the occasion to preach the gospel of defeatism! I have passed through most of the difficulties of the *sadhakas*, but I cannot recollect to have looked on delight of poetical creation or concentration in it as something undivine and a cause for despair. This seems to me excessive. Even Shankaracharya would not agree with you here.

"If you can't remember the Divine all the time you are writing, it does not greatly matter. To remember and dedicate at the beginning and give thanks at the end ought to be enough. Or, at the most, to remember too when there is a pause. Your method seems to me rather painful and difficult, you seem to be trying to remember and work with the same part of your mind. I don't know if that is possible. When people remember all the time during work (it can be done) it is usually with the back of their minds or else there is created gradually a double consciousness—one in front that works, one within that witnesses and remembers. But this is only a comment—I am not asking you to try that. For usually it does not come so much by trying as by a very simple constant aspiration and will of consecration—which

does bring results, even if in some it takes a long time about it. That is a great secret of *sadhana*—to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind's effort. Let me hasten to say, however, that I am not dogmatising—I don't mean to say that the mind's effort is unnecessary or has no result—only if it tries to do all by itself, that becomes a laborious effort for all except the spiritual athletes. Nor do I mean that the other method is the longed-for short cut; the result may, as I have said, take a long time. Patience and firm resolution are necessary in every method of *sadhana*.

"Strength is all right for the strong—but the aspiration and Grace answering to it are not altogether myths. Again, you see, I am muddling the human mind—like Krishna of the Gita—by supporting contrary things at the same time—can't help it—it is my nature.

"But I am unable to explain further today—so I break off these divagations. I am rather too overburdened with 'work' these days to have much time for the expression of 'knowledge'. This is simply a random answer."

The general reader, I feel, is likely to appraise the value of letters such as these in terms either of their weightiness of matter or profundity of wisdom. But to us, his disciples, every such communication was valued even more as a token of his Grace than for its other merits, as also because of the light it carried from the fount of his luminous personality which we had grown to cherish. To me, personally, his letters radiating affection imparted something even more convincing—possibly because only such personal letters

could convey to my sceptic mind the light of seerhood that hovered round him, through a receptive emotion which nothing short of an intimate contact with his soul of compassion could arouse. Besides, had he not written to me once: "I am certainly not helping you only with letters, but doing it whenever I get some time for concentration and I notice that when I can do it with sufficient energy and at some length there is a response." Outsiders may not seize the import of this, but as I saw the effect of his concentration on and for me day after patient day, I had to believe in its concrete efficacy. Could it be otherwise when, time and again, I experienced my glooms melting away like mists before sunrise and strength returning to me through his exhortations dripping every time the deep tenderness of his solicitude? On one occasion my gloom evaporated in a moment—it was almost like a let-there-be-light-and-there-was-light miracle. I was at the time in an utter mental prostration and wrote that I could well understand his inability to help me out of the abyss of my despond since he could not possibly spare time for one so opaque to his force. To that he wrote: "Want of time does not come in the way as there is no day on which I do not devote some time to thinking of you and concentrating for you. The difficulty lies in the removal of the obstruction in the physical mind—what you feel as the impasse. But it will go if you persevere. What seemed to be denied and impossible for years (bringing about a state of helpless stagnation and hopelessness and disbelief in even the goodwill and power of the Divine, the spiritual Force and the Guru)



suddenly happens after all—when those who never had any experience for years get the opening. The difficulty is great and the darkness of the material consciousness obstinate, but still if one knows how to persist or even to wait, the Light comes...”

And then he went on to add reassuringly:

“It is not true that you never received force from us. You have received it *to any extent*; it can only be said that you were not conscious of it, but that happens with many. Certainly none of the *sadhakas* receives or uses all the Force that the Mother sends, but that is a general fact and not peculiar to you. I hope you will not carry out your idea of going suddenly away....Whatever else you may doubt, you should not doubt that our love and affection will always be with you. But I still hope that you will be able to overcome this despair and develop the great force of intense will that is sure to come.”

And he wrote in a postscript in reply to my sigh over his preoccupation with the Empyrean: “No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy: I wish I was! It is rather with the opposite end of things: it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two.”

What exactly he meant by building a bridge and what was the nature of the resistance he was confronted with at every turn we shall probably never know, but we can surely infer from his beautiful if somewhat sad poem, *A God's Labour*, that he had known all along that it was unlikely to be an easy achievement of swift Yogic engineering:



I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge  
Marrying the soil to the sky  
And sow in this dancing planet midge  
The moods of infinity.

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,  
Too frail their ethereal stuff;  
Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;  
The roots were not deep enough.

How could the "roots" be "deep enough" when we, instead of tending the saplings, would throw so lightly away the seeds of faith and aspiration he would plant again and again in us? To give but one instance, one of his disciples on whom he had simply lavished his love declined to change and deserted. A year later this man wrote to me flaunting not only an ephemeral success of a trivial undertaking of his but rationalising it into a deep (?) philosophy:

"Life is a mirror, Dilip," he lucubrated complacently, "and being a mirror, it must return smile for smile and frown for frown." I forwarded it to Gurudev and received his comment the next morning:

"As for his 'philosophy' it is phrases and nothing else: what he means is, I suppose, that when one is successful one can be jolly—which is not philosophy but commonplace, only he turns it upside down to make it look wise. Or perhaps he means that if you smile at Mussolini and Hitler they will spare you castor-oil or cudgel: but even

that is not sure, for they may want to know what the smile means first—flattery or satire.”

But smile or no smile, he added, one must stave off defeatism and eschew the expensive luxury of despondency!

“Don’t allow the assailant (Insidious Mr. Doubt) to become a companion, don’t give him the open door and fireside seat. Above all, don’t drive away the incoming Divine with that dispiriting wet blanket of sadness and despair! Or, to put it more soberly, accept once for all that this thing *has* to be done, that it is the only thing left for yourself on the earth. Outside are earthquakes and Hitlers and a collapsing civilization and generally speaking, the ass and the flood.<sup>1</sup> All the more reason to tend towards the one thing to be done, the thing you have been sent to do, and for getting it done. It is difficult and the way long and the encouragement given meagre? What then? Why should you expect so great a thing to be easy or that there must be either a swift success or none? The difficulties have to be faced, and the more cheerfully they are faced, the sooner will they be overcome. The one thing to do is to keep the *mantra* of success, the determination of victory, the fixed resolve: ‘Have it I must and have it I will’. Impossible? There is no such thing as impossibility: there are difficulties and things of *longue haleine*, but impossibilities, no. What one is determined fixedly to do, will get done—now or later it becomes possible. Drive

<sup>1</sup> Reference is to a parable which is to follow presently.

out the dark despair and go bravely on with your poetry, your novels and your Yoga. As the darkness disappears, the inner doors too will open."

Tagore once said of the poetry of my father, Dwijendra Lal Roy, that he passed from the serious to the light moods with an astonishing ease of transit. The same might be said of Sri Aurobindo's letters though not of his other writings which are more concerned with an illumined clarity than with the chiaroscuro of wit and humour. We had come to the Ashram drawn by this magnetic light with which his messages were instinct. But it was, more often than not, a dazzle rather than an effulgence to our novice eyes. So when, in the 'thirties, he started writing his letters, somewhat freely, naturally we all acclaimed them as much for the relief as for the rapture his light moods occasioned in our somewhat over-impressed breasts still resonant with the tribute of a quondam Prime Minister of England:

"I called on one whose name is on every lip as a wild extremist across whose path the shadow of the hangman falls...He talked of things which trouble the soul of man; he wandered aimlessly into the dim regions of aspiration where the mind finds a soothing resting-place. He was far more a mystic than a politician. He saw India seated on a temple throne...Man has to fulfil God, he has written, and that is only possible by fulfilling himself, this again being possible only through nationality...The *Matripuja*—the worship of the Mother—has become a political rite...He returns to his Gods and to the faith



of his country for there is no India without its faith and no faith without India."<sup>1</sup>

We felt a sense of relief because when we dwell on tributes such as these the awe they generate militate against the sense of kinship we so often strive to feel with the Guru but in vain: he is too great for such as we, is he not?—we ask ourselves almost with a pang. But *laus Deo*—when such a living orb of superhumanity comes down to us with letters limpid with love and a human understanding which we can understand, then comes the thrill because the incredible thing then seems to have come to pass: even such a giant can then, on occasions, dwarf himself so that we may feel his humanity! I can almost recapture the thrill which his first letters gave us and the mystic thanksgiving that rose from our hearts like vapour from a calm lake at sundown, wistful and yet iridescent with romance. For such a great revolutionary, who matured later into an even greater Yogi of invulnerable gravity, to have retained unimpaired the human zest for laughter and humour and repartees! About his humour we gathered titbits only through anecdotes and cautious gossip when I learned, to my immense relief, that though in society he withdrew generally into the shell of his deep, congenital reserve, with his intimates of the inner circle he had always loved to indulge in banter and laughter and quips of every description. An old friend of his once gave me a sample

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from J. Ramsay Macdonald's *The Awakening in India* first published in London in 1910.



of his pre-yogic humour. "The Prince of Baroda was going to be married," he said. "In those days monogamy was not particularly insisted on. Sri Aurobindo was then the Vice-Principal of the Gaekwar's College. When the distinguished guests had assembled for the wedding dinner, the royal bridegroom came up to him dignified and demure. The grave Vice-Principal, revered by all, shook hands with 'the cynosure of neighbouring eyes' and wished him 'Many many happy returns of the day!'"

As I have said, in the Ashram they often told me how refreshingly he used to spar with his adherents of old. I always envied them the privilege they had enjoyed till, in the course of time, he began writing freely to me. I must quote here in full the first letter he wrote shedding the solace of his humour on my badly hurt head. This happened in 1932.

"You struck your head against the upper sill of the door our engineer Chandulal fixed in your room?" he wrote. "A pity, no doubt. But remember that Chandulal's dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable: the only thing he forgot was that people—of various sizes—should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russellian, *objective* point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then this will be brought home to you and you will see that it was quite all right. It is only when you bring in irrelevant *subjective* considerations like people's demands on a door and the pain of a stunned head, that objections can be made. However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother

will speak to Chandulal in the morning and get him to do what has (practically, not philosophically) to be done. May I suggest, however, if it is any consolation to you, that our Lilliputian engineer perhaps measured things by his own head, forgetting that there were in the Ashram higher heads and broader shoulders?...As for the Divine rapture, a knock on the head or foot or elsewhere can be received with the physical *ananda* of pain or pain and *ananda* or pure physical *ananda*—for I have often, quite involuntarily, made the experiment myself and passed with honours. It began, by the way, as far back as in Alipore Jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious-looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses. But I do not expect that unusual reaction from others. And I suppose there are limits, e.g. the case of the picketers in Madras or Dr. Noel Paton." (These were beaten by the police as a result of which there were many fractured skulls.) "In any case their way of having rapture is better off the list and that dwarfish doorway was not a happy contrivance."

Then came, in 1934, his comment on the parable I had retailed to him of the ass and the flood:

"Once upon a time, Guru, there was a foolish ass who lived in the neighbourhood of a wise Yogi. One day a sudden flood burst the banks of a river nearby and flooded the countryside. The wise Yogi, being wise, ran up till he reached the safe top of a hill at the foot of which he used to meditate day and night in a cave. But the ass—being foolish, not to say unmeditative—was swept away by the rush-

ing tides. 'Alas!' he brayed, 'the world is being drowned!' 'Don't be an ass,' reprimanded the Yogi in high scorn from up the hill-top. 'It's only you who are being drowned—not this great big world.' 'But sir,' argued the idiot, 'if I myself am drowned how can I be sure that the world will survive?' And the Yogi was struck dumb and wondered, for the first time, which was the deeper wisdom—the human or the asinine! And I too have started wondering on my own, Guru!" I added. "So I appeal to you to adjudicate: tell me whose is the more pitiable plight: the Yogi's or the ass's? And incidentally, tell me also if my mind is going off the handle because I find the foolish ass's argument nearly as rational as the wise Yogi's?"

To that he replied: "Your wise but not overwise ass has put a question that cannot be answered in two lines. Let me say, however, in defence of the much-maligned ass that he is a very clever and practical animal and the malignant imputation of stupidity to him shows only human stupidity at its worst. It is because the ass does not do what man wants him to do even under blows, that he is taxed with stupidity.

"But really, the ass behaves like that first because he has a sense of humour and likes to provoke the two-legged beast into irrational antics; and secondly, because he finds that what man wants of him is quite a ridiculous and bothersome nuisance which ought not to be demanded of any self-respecting donkey. Also note that the ass is a philosopher. When he hee-haws, it is out of a supreme contempt for the world in general and for the human imbecile in particular.



I have no doubt that in the asinine language man has the same significance as ass in ours. These deep and original considerations are, however, by the way—merely meant to hint to you that your balancing between a wise man and the wise ass is not so alarming a symptom after all.”

Once a rather funny thing happened in 1933. We used in those days to have a musical programme in the Ashram, about once in two months. As I was singing a song on Krishna on one such occasion with Mother sitting before me in *samadhi*, I was conscious of a sudden commotion behind me where the others were sitting. A senior *sadhaka* of considerable girth, Purushottam—so I was told subsequently—got up on a sudden to dance when Ambu, a rather thin though strong youth, leapt up to restrain the other’s indomitable ecstasy, as a result of which there was, necessarily, a tussle. So the musical *soirée* was partially spoiled. This saddened me and I asked Sri Aurobindo if I had been responsible in any way, or if I had simulated a *bhakti* unfelt by my heart. To that he replied:

“There was no misdirection of your appeal to Krishna; if there was anybody responsible it was Anilkumar with his *tabla* (Indian drum). But there was nothing wrong and no possession in the evil sense of the word—nothing hostile. The beat of the *tabla*—more than anything else—created a vibration which was caught hold of by some rhythmic material energy and that in turn was caught hold of by Purushottam’s body which considered itself under a compulsion to execute the rhythm by a dance. There is the whole



(occult) science and genesis of the affair. Purushottam thought he was inspired and in a trance; Ambu thought Purushottam was going to break his own head and other people's legs; a number of others thought Purushottam was going cracked or already cracked; some thought Purushottam was killing Ambu which Ambu contemptuously rejects, saying he was able to hold Purushottam all alone, and out of these conflicting mental judgments—if they can be called so—arose the whole row. A greater quietude in people's minds would have allowed the incident to be 'liquidated' in a less uproarious fashion—but the Mother was absorbed in the music and could only intervene later on when Champaklal consulted her. That is all."

And sometimes, though rarely, we had pure fun as well—just unqualified laughter and mirth. To give an instance or two:

I had a friend whom we called Bindu. He wrote to Gurudev (1934) a long letter besieging him with a number of world-shaking questions to which the reply came in due course:

"Bindu,

Good heavens! But what! But when! But which! You expect me to give you 'clear and concise' notes on all that, fixing the 'nature and salient features' of each blessed thing? It will take me several Sundays wholly devoted to grappling with this tremendous task! And how the deuce am I to tell you in a 'clear and concise way' what consciousness is or mind or life is? Do you think these confounded entities are

themselves clear and concise or have any 'salient features'? They are 'salient' only in the Latin sense of jumping about all the time and becoming something different each moment. As for 'consciousness' you might as well ask me to define the world. Of course I could do it by replying—'a damned mess', and that would be very satisfactory to me as well as 'clear and concise' but it would hardly serve the purpose."

Bindu had, however, a peculiar humour wedded to a native gift for insistence which he developed like a master craftsman till it looked almost indistinguishable from genius. I can give it no other name because in those days Gurudev or Mother never allowed outsiders to cook for them. But his sheer importunate genius prevailed and he was allowed to cook what we call *prasad*. This he sent up duly to Gurudev who ate of it but not much, whereupon Bindu penned him a disconsolate letter a copy of which I still possess.

"Gurudev," he wrote, "Nalina brought me back the dishes. I was stunned to find that you had hardly touched them. I am deeply pained, sorely disappointed, utterly dejected and mortally wounded, and cannot imagine why you are so unsympathetic to me."

Gurudev wrote back a sweet letter of solace:

"Bindu!

Don't be absurd! Our sympathy towards you is profound and perfect, but it cannot be measured by our sympathy towards your eatables. We, usually, just taste the *prasad*

people send to us; sometimes we take more but never when it is very sweet or very extraordinary. Of your vermicelli pudding we could well speak in the language of the passionate address of the lover to his beloved: 'O sweet! O too too sweet!' (which doesn't mean, though, that it was not well done). And the stew was extraordinary, albeit of another world—so much so that if I tasted the first forkful with anxiety, the second was with awe, after which I ventured no farther into these unknown countries. By the way, I took much more of the vermicelli than I usually do of these concentrated puddings. So you are wrong in thinking that I did not touch your *prasad*."

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Bindu came triumphantly to me flourishing the letter as a lethal weapon.

"You may write to him reams and reams of letters and poems and what not," he chortled, "but you dare not *cook* for him."

"Don't be silly!" I returned. "Any duffer can."

"I defy you to prove it, scoffer!" he retaliated.

I had to accept the challenge, to save my face. But here too came a snag, for the stipulation was that I must peel, boil, fry—in a word, do all that had to be done single-handed.

So when I had playfully accepted the gauntlet flung by him, I felt scared: how could one who had never even boiled an egg in his life manipulate into being an eatable dish over

the stove? Joking was all right, but I could hardly send up to Gurudev and Mother a horrible concoction as a *prasad*! Suddenly I had a brain-wave: I appealed piteously to an experienced matron, Amiya, to come to my rescue and thus prove my saviour. I asked her to direct me, verbally, without moving a finger. And lo, it worked! The incredible miracle was achieved! A vegetable *entrée* of potatoes, peas, and tomatoes was got ready by myself, single-handed, in less than an hour and a half! As I sent it up to Gurudev I wrote in my explanatory letter all about its genesis and evolution and then went on to add, casually, that though it was literally "cooked all by myself," I had availed myself of a few "whispering directions" by Amiya.

His heartening letter came duly, the next morning.

"Your cooking is remarkable and wonderful," he wrote. "If you had not disclosed the secret about Amiya's 'whispers' I would have been inclined to claim it as a *yogic miracle*! Even with the 'whispers' it is an astonishing first success. *Ashcharyavat pashyati kashchidenam*<sup>1</sup> as the Gita says! My palate and stomach as well as my pen has done full justice to the event."

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"Guru," I wrote once, "Lady Indignant told me today that she had reported of late to you that she was being forced by me and Saurin to accept our invitations to tea. A word

<sup>1</sup> Krishna's saying—it means 'some look upon it as amazing.'



in self-defence. We never suspected that she had disliked our—shall I say—‘chivalry.’ In fact when we invited her she complied after a few no’s which we had, naturally, interpreted as yes because when she came to tea, she, with her face wreathed in smiles, did not at all toy with the tea, far less with the cakes! ‘Caprice!’ I philosophised ruefully, ‘thy name is woman!’ But henceforth—now that the iron has entered my soul—she comes to tea to us at her own peril, let her beware!”

He wrote back, applauding: “Well, that is all right. If Lady Indignant is a devotee of the Great *Cha*<sup>1</sup> Devi—she will fly and throw herself on the altar without need of urging: if not, she will sit in tealess meditation, invitation-free. As for chivalry, however, it is more than a century ago that Burke lamented: ‘The days of chivalry are gone’! And in the year of grace, 1932, with feminism triumphant everywhere—except in France and Bokhara—how do you propose to keep the cult going any longer?”

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Sometimes—just for fun—we wrote to him telegraphically even though it bordered upon irreverence if not blasphemy. Here is a sample.

“O Guru,” I dashed off, “I send you a Bengali poem of mine entitled *Akuti* which I translated last night into English. Can you revise it? Is it good? Mediocre? Worth-

<sup>1</sup> *Cha*, in Bengali, means tea.

less? Frank opinion, please! But what about Raihana's letter? Won't return? You keep mum. What's up? Bridge-building? Supramental? Wool-gathering?"

His repartee came, as echo to the song:

"I shall see if I can get a few minutes for revising your English translation. But you seem to have progressed greatly in your English verse—(How so quickly? Yogic Force? Internal combustion? The subliminal self?) Raihana's letter and drawing which have unaccountably turned up again with me. (Poltergeist? Your inadvertence? Mine?)"

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"O Guru," I wrote, "I could not meditate of late, thanks to mountains of proofs. But soon I will start like Pahari Baba. So beware!"

He answered it promptly the next day:

"After mountains of proof the mountain of meditation, with you, the BABA, on top? All right: I am ready to face it."

"O Guru," I wrote, "three solid pieces of jolly news: first, a Muslim writer named Abul Fazl comes to congratulate me because in my recent controversy with Tagore, he opines, the latter had very much the worst of it. Then comes a savant who praises my Bengali novel, *Dola*. Last, though not least, turns up a Zamindar who implores me to draft for him an address for a local doctor who has been honoured by a Rajah. Now tell me, do you smile on it or frown?"

He wrote back: 'I sympathise. Three cheers for Abul Fazl and the savant. But I don't feel enthusiastic about the doctor even though honoured by a Rajah! What are things coming to! (Please don't tell this to Nirod). Perhaps, however, it may be on the principle: 'Honour the doctor that thy life may be long in the land!' But then to call in an eminent litterateur like you is after all appropriate. You can furnish them with a long address on the romance of medicine beginning with Dhanwantari, Charaka and Galen and ending with Nirod Taluqdar or Dr. Ramchandra.'

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When his correspondence in our Ashram increased to unconscionable proportions and he had to deal with them all by himself night after night from 9 p. m. till 5 a. m. the next morning, Mother intervened and decided that henceforth only *a few* were to be allowed to write to him, by *special* permission. But as the number of the privileged ones mounted day by day, I wrote one day to him (1935):

"To how many have you given a special permission to write to you daily? Nirod confided to me—it's 121. Bindu says—impossible, it is only 97, out of the present total 150."

The reply came:

"The number openly accepted is two by tacit understanding, two by express notice and two by self-given permission. If it had been 97 or 121 I would have translated

myself to the Gobi desert or the Lake Manasa in the style of Sri Bijoy Krishna Goswami."

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"O Guru," I wrote once, "Lady Demure insists on being deeply shocked whenever somebody is caught lying, forgetting that she lies herself—as often as not. But then we *all* lie, Guru! So why are we so profoundly shocked when others repeat our favourite pastime? Please elucidate."

"Lies?" he wrote back. "Well, a Punjabi student at Cambridge once took our breath away by the frankness and comprehensive profundity of his affirmation: 'Liars! But we are all liars!' It appeared that he had intended to say 'lawyers', but his pronunciation gave his remark a deep force of philosophic observation and generalisation which he had not intended! But it seems to me the last word on human nature. Only the lying is sometimes intentional, sometimes vaguely half-intentional, sometimes quite unintentional, momentary and unconscious. So there you are!"

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"O Guru," I confided, "Mr. Cocksure harangued me for nearly half-an-hour that he feels a wonderful power astir in him day and night leading him to a wonderful self-surrender! I am impressed. Aren't you?"

On this he commented :



"When he speaks of the power in him and his self-surrender—well, one can only wish that if and when people are so wonderful, they might as well be a trifle less eloquent about their wonderfulness. One never knows to what this excessive self-appreciation will lead and the past examples do not encourage."

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"O Guru", I communicated, "Mr. Effusive, who is an admirer of yours has just sent me a Bengali poem which he implores me to sing to you 'without fail'. But I wonder how you would react to it if I complied, for he has in effect sounded the death-knell of Rishihood, calling you virtually the last of the Romans. I will translate into English only the opening couplet so that Mother may also know, just to be forewarned:

'Glory to thee, O wistful India's last and lingering seer!  
Let me expire with thee, my Lord, who never more shalt  
appear.'

One hardly knows whether one should be laughing or whether weeping is here *de rigueur*? What do you say? And he wants your blessings too, remember!"

"Dilip," Gurudev admonished, "you don't understand! What he means is that my *shishyagan* (disciples) will all become supermen; ergo, there can be no possible chance of any such small thing as a Rishi (seer) appearing again—I am positively the last of that crowd. All the same,

you may send him my blessings—he deserves it richly for giving us such a gorgeous prospect.”

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“O Guru,” I wrote after reading two autobiographies which set me thinking once again, “in Yoga, prayers have, I understand, a very important function to fulfil even when they are of the petitionary brand. In his reminiscences entitled *Vale* Dean Inge says, with true humility, that although the pearl of great price is only for those few who stake their all for the All-in-all, yet no sincere prayer is unheard. But then, I ask myself, why is there so much preventible misery when *les misérables* keep praying—at any rate a large proportion of them do. I have seen myself so many praying and praying till they are blue in the face but nothing happened! Dean Inge may assert that his prayers have been heard often enough, but what about our Jawaharlal who writes, equally categorically, that he has often enough been just thirsty for a little peace but to no purpose? No wonder his scepticism is reinforced about a Divine Ordainer and he goes on fuming against the religious. To the seer mystic his indictments may seem crude and superficial, but can one say that he really is as childish as he seems since he does not, alas, want to dive deeper and so remains where he is, admiring Gandhiji (I believe, sincerely?) and yet poohpoohing his profoundest impulse—towards mysticism! Or is it because he simply hankered for peace—but never prayed?”

"As for prayer," he wrote back, "no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. The eldest daughter of my maternal uncle, Sri Krishna Kumar Mitra (the editor of *Sanjivani*—not by any means a romantic, occult, supra-physical or even an imaginative person) was abandoned by the doctors after using every resource, all medicines stopped as useless. The father said: 'There is only God now, let us pray.' He did and from that moment the girl began to recover, the typhoid fever and all symptoms fled, death also. I know of any number of cases like that. Well? You may ask why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they? It is not a machinery: put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would be in a rather awkward hole if he had to grant all of them; it wouldn't do. As for Jawaharlal, he has perhaps something in his temperament that might answer to the supraphysical, but by his intellect he has so put it down that it is not likely to act in any overt manner."

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"O Guru," I appealed. "Lady Indignant is again down on us, males! She says man is such a foul seducer and poor woman (poor? a modern woman? good Lord!) such a guileless, simple and trustful tendril! I retaliated in banter and reminded her what Tagore had sighed over in the 'twenties: 'We are a much maligned sex, Dilip!

The fair one would have it that we pursue and harry her. But between you and me, do you think that the most leonine of lions could dare approach a woman if she *really* frowned upon his advances?' So adjudicate, Guru: who tempts first—man or woman? Or shall we say *à la* Sir Roger de Coverley: 'Much can be said on both sides?' "

"Dilip," he answered, "it is six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. To throw it all on woman is Adamism. To ignore the man's part is feminism. Both are in error. Yes, Sir Roger is right."

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"O Guru," wailed the Man of Sorrows in me. "So be it. Since I have been hanging too long in mid-air and must land somewhere somehow, anyhow—therefore I propose—subject to your approval—a drastic prescription for my long-suffering unconvalescing self.

"Number one. I will give up tea: I love it.

"Number two. I will do without cheese: I like it.

"Number three. I will bid adieu to tasty dishes and start periodic fasts.

"Number four. Will forswear hair-oil and shave my head. (I was not baldish in those days).

"Number five. I will sleep on only one sole blanket, pillowless. But note: I tried this before already and remember that although you have kept me in reasonable comfort, I came ready to brave any austerity.



"Number six. I will sleep without the mosquito-curtain which, I fear, will be the most difficult of all feats because I have never been able to hail the crooning of the mosquito as a lullaby.

"Only believe me when I say that although I move this resolution in a language that may sound unparliamentary, my heart is really heavy and tearful, since I can see no shorter cut to salvation. So, in the circumstances, will you and the Mother ratify my resolution, or amend, please?"

My letter was dated September 14, 1935.

He wrote back precipitately: "I stand aghast as I stare at the detailed proposals made by you! Fastings? I don't believe in them, though I have done them myself. You would really eat like an ogre afterwards. Shaved head? Great heavens! Have you realised the consequences? I pass over the aesthetic shock to myself at *darshan* on the 24th November from which I might never recover—but the row that would rise from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas! You would be famous in a new way which would cast all your previous glories into the shade. And just when you are turning away from fame and all the things of the ego! No: too dangerous by half. Sleep without the mosquito-net? That would mean no sleep, which is as bad as no food. Not only your eyes would become weak, but yourself also—and, to boot, gloomy, grey and gruesome—more gruesome than the Supramental of your worst apprehensions! No and No again. As for the rest, I placed some of them before the Mother and she eyed them without favour.

"After all, real asceticism is hardly possible except in a hut or in the Himalayas. The heart of asceticism, besides, is having no desires or attachments, being indifferent, able to do without things, satisfied with whatever comes. If you 'asceticise' outwardly, it becomes a rule of life and you keep it up because it is a rule, for the principle of the thing or for the *kudos* of it—as a point of honour. But I have noticed about ascetics by rule that when you remove the curb they become just like others—barring a few exceptions, of course—which proves that the transformation was not real. A more subtle method used by some is to give up for a time, then try the object of desire again and so go on till you have thoroughly tested yourself; e.g., you give up your potatoes and eat only the Ashram food for a time—if the call comes for the potatoes or from them, then you are not cured: if no call comes, still you cannot be sure till you have tried potatoes again, and seen whether the desire, attachment or sense of need revives. If it does not and the potatoes fall away from you of themselves, then there is some hope that the thing is done.

"However, all this will make you think that I am hardly fit to be a Guru in the path of asceticism and you will probably be right. You see, I have a strong penchant for the inner working and am persuaded that if you give the psychic a chance it will rid you of the impediments you chafe at without all this sternness and trouble."

"O Guru," I replied, "I thank you sincerely for refusing assent to my doom. And yet, paradoxically, I feel a definite disappointment too along with the relief. For I

had a lurking suspicion that your Supramental wisdom might still be wanting to impose asceticism on me since I have, willy-nilly, to practise your *Supramental* Yoga and no other; so I decided, after a mighty wrench, to ban everything my *mental* loved or even approved of. But now you yourself are turning down my proposal to conquer attachments which are holding me up. I repeat, however, that I am still 'game' if you reconsider your veto to give me another trial."

To that he replied next morning:

"But how in the earthly did you get this strange idea that we were pressing asceticism on you? When? How? Where? I only admitted it as a possibility after repeated assertions from you that you wanted to do this formidable thing, and it was with great heart-searchings and terrible apprehensive visions of an ascetic Dilip with wild weird eyes and in loin-cloth, eating groundnuts and nails and sleeping on iron-spikes in the presence of a dumbfounded Lord Shiva! I never prescribed the thing to you at all: it was you who were clamouring for it, so I gave in and tried to make the best of it, hoping that you would think better of it. As for the Mother, the first time she heard of it she knocked it off with the most emphatic 'Nonsense!' possible. In fact what you proposed was even more formidable than my vision—a shaven-headed and mosquito-bitten Dilip in loin-cloth and the rest (not that you actually proposed the last but it is the logical outcome of the devastating shave!). Conquest of attachment is quite a different matter—one has to learn to take one's tea and



potatoes without weeping for them or even missing them if they are not there. But we have repeatedly said that you could go on with them and need not follow the way taken by others. As to seclusion, I have written my distrust of retirement several times: it is only a few people who can do it and profit, but they are not a rule for others... If I am living in my room it is not out of a passion for solitude... So you need not be anxious: solitude is not demanded of you, for an ascetic dryness or isolated loneliness cannot be your destiny since it is not consonant with your *swabhava* (nature) which is made for joy, largeness, expansion, a comprehensive movement of the life-force. So your subtle interpretation of our intentions or wishes was a bad misfit. However, all is well that ends well and in spite of your suggestion of being 'game' I will consider the danger over. *Laus Deo!*"

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The Maharaja of Dewas who was then a refugee in Pondicherry once invited me to dinner. Gurudev wrote:

"I hope your dinner did not turn out like my first taste of Maharatta cookery—when for some reason my dinner was *non est* and somebody went to my neighbour, a Maharatta Professor, for food. I took one mouthful and only one. O God! Sudden fire in the mouth could not have been more cataclysmic! Enough to bring down the whole of London in one agonised sweep of flame!"



I must pause here and insert a rather long explanatory parenthesis. For I fear I may have written (while referring to Sri Aurobindo's innate love of humour and laughter) what is liable to convey a wrong impression to those who are interested in the all-too-lovable human side of his personality. What I mean is that I did not want to stress that he was ever expansive by nature in the social sense of the term. For when I cast about for solid data, I must admit that I cannot name anyone in the Ashram with whom he cracked jokes in this way without any reserve whatsoever. There was only one other with whom he was equally free: Nirod. But when he sparred with his doctor disciple, assuredly quite another side of his nature found expression albeit I find it difficult to label. For he was nothing if not incalculable. All the same, I may not be far out if I say that what expressed itself through his letters to Nirod was his love of raillery oscillating between a Shavian playfulness and a Ramakrishnonian *badinage*. I shall present to the reader now by way of sample a few letters he wrote to him in the mid-thirties which will perhaps serve my purpose better.

Nirod wrote to him (in 1935):

"I wonder, Sir, if you have seen Professor Adhar Das's inveighings against your *Lights on Yoga*? He does not look like having grasped your Light very well—or, shall we say, he grasped it like a typical pedagogue? For he seems to be in a veritable quandary when he goes all out for you—even his nearest misses are wider than the Pacific, aren't they?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have read all those sweet things from the sweet Adhar.<sup>1</sup> He had been favourable without understanding much before Anilbaran butted in and gored him into bitterness. Grasp of things has never been his forte.

"He seems to think that D.I. = E.N.R. or C.S.R. (Divinisation of the Individual — Emergence of a New Race or Creation of the Supramental Race). So, he holds, if D.I. is possible then C.S.R. must be superfluous or out of the question,—but why, I have never been able to fathom, because it takes individuals to make a new race and if a certain number of individuals are not divinised, I do not see how you are going to get a new race. As for its being 'out of the question', the great Panjandrum alone knows why, once an individual is divinised—one obviously is not enough—it should be out of the question to go on divinising others until you have a 'new race'. But I suppose unless you create unnecessary quibbles, there can be no 'intellectual' philosophy!"

"I thought, Sir," Nirod rejoined, "that there is quite a difference between divinisation and supramentalisation, the former leading up to the latter. But I suppose it is sheer presumption on my part to criticise one from whom, you say, you have learnt your philosophy. But aren't they simply longing to see the first batch of the Supramental compound to be fabricated in your great laboratory?"

"Yes, of course," Gurudev returned, "only as I have never explained in these letters (in my *Lights on Yoga*) what

<sup>1</sup> Here the pun is on *adhar* which, in Sanskrit means, the under lip.

I meant by Supermind, these critics are necessarily at sea. They think, pardonably enough, that anything above the human mind must be Supramental. No, not learnt, say rather that I am slowly learning from him. For he is kindly teaching me what I meant....Go forward and show yourself."

And Nirod complied, with alacrity:

"I draw your attention then to Adhar Das's verdict that your vision of the new race to be is an extravagant claim in as much as it gives the lie to logic as well as to the lives and experiences of past seers. Well, Sir?"

"Well," Gurudev echoed, "I don't suppose the 'new race' can be created by or according to logic or that *any race has been*. But why should the idea of the creation of a new race be illogical? It is not only my ideas that baffle reason but Adhar Das's also!—he must really be a superman—self-made of course—outside the laboratory. As for the past seers, they don't trouble me. If going beyond the experience of past seers and sages is so shocking, each new seer or sage in turn has perpetrated that shocking thing—Buddha, Shankara, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda—all did that wicked act. If not, what was the necessity of their starting new philosophies, religions, schools of Yoga? If they were merely verifying and meekly repeating the lives and experiences of past seers and sages without bringing the world some new thing, why all that stir and pother? You may say: they were simply explaining the old truth but in the right way—but this would mean that nobody had explained or understood it rightly before, which is again 'giving the lie



to logic as well as to the lives and experiences of past seers! Or you may say that all the new sages (they are not among Adhar's cherished past ones in their day), e.g. Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhava and others were merely repeating the same blessed thing as the past seers and sages themselves had repeated with an unwearied monotony before them. Well, well, but then why repeat it in such a way that each 'gives the lie' to the others? Truly, this shocked reverence for the past is a wonderful and fearful thing! After all, the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the Truth may as well be an infinite process or at all events, if not quite so much, yet with some room for new discovery and new statement, even perhaps new achievement, not a thing in a nutshell cracked and its content exhausted once and for all by the first seers or sages; while the others religiously crack the same nut all over again, each trembling in fear lest he give the lie to the past seers and sages!"

"But Guru", pursued Nirod, "I must seek further clarification: What on earth does Adhar Das mean by 'Our Yoga is not for our sakes but for the Divine'? And what do *you* mean by it? Is it something like the Vaishnava idea of absolute surrender, without even the desire to see Him—only give, give, give? A sublime conception, no doubt. but can it be possibly feasible and practical?"

"Well," he explained, "I once wrote in my callow days: 'Our Yoga is not for ourselves but for humanity'—that was in the *Bande Mataram* times. To get out of the self-created hole I had to amend that it was no longer for humanity but for the Divine! The 'not for ourselves' remained intact,



...Quite possible and practical and a very rapturous thing as anyone who has done it can tell you. It is also the easiest and most powerful way of getting the Divine. So it is the best policy also. The phrase, however, means that the object of the Yoga is to enter and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its object is not to be a great Yogi or a superman (although that may come) or to grab at the Divine for the sake of the ego's power, pride, or pleasure. It is not for *moksha*, though liberation comes by it and all else may come but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object."

Apropos of Professor Adhar Das's swearing by the past, I must quote a letter in which Gurudev gave a similar clarification about humility versus sense of superiority. I had quoted in my letter from Vivekananda who often decried the so-called faith as the root of much intolerant scorn of others who did not or would not believe. I confessed that I could not take as gospel truth many dogmas which the faithful hold to, thanks to my past education which made me side with tolerance as against over-assertiveness.

"As for the sense of superiority," he replied, "that is a little difficult to avoid when greater horizons open before the consciousness, unless one is already of a saintly and humble disposition. There are men like Nag Mahashaya (among Sri Ramakrishna's disciples) in whom spiritual experience creates more and more humility; there are others, like Vivekananda, in whom it creates a great sense of strength

and superiority—European critics have taxed him with it rather severely; there are others in whom it fixes a sense of superiority to men and humility to the Divine. Each position has its value. Take Vivekananda's famous answer to the Madras Pundit who objected to one of his assertions, saying: 'But Shankara does not say so'. Vivekananda replied: "No, but I, Vivekananda, say so," and the Pundit was speechless. That 'I, Vivekananda' stands up to the ordinary eye like a Himalaya of self-confident egoism. But there is nothing false or unsound in Vivekananda's spiritual experience. For this was not egoism, but the sense of what he stood for and the attitude of the fighter who, as the representative of something very great, could not allow himself to be put down or belittled. This is not to deny the necessity of non-egoism and spiritual humility, but to show that the question is not so easy as it appears at first sight. For if I have to express my spiritual experiences I must do that with truth—I must record them with their *bhava*, their thoughts, feelings, extensions of consciousness which accompany them. What am I to do with the experience in which one feels the whole world in oneself or the force of the Divine flowing in one's being and nature or the certitude of one's faith against all doubts or doubters or one's oneness with the Divine or the smallness of human thought and life compared with this greater knowledge and existence? And I have to use the word 'I'—I cannot take refuge in saying 'this body' or 'this appearance', especially as I am not a *Mayavadin*. Shall I not, therefore, fall into an expression which may make some shake their heads at my assertions

as full of pride and ego? I imagine it would be difficult to avert it.

"Another thing: it seems to me that you identify faith very much with mental belief, but real faith is something spiritual, a knowledge of the soul. What you quote in your letters are the hard assertions of mental belief leading to a vehement vindication of one's mental creed and goal because they are one's own and must therefore be greater than those of others—an attitude which is universal in human nature. Even the atheist is not tolerant but declares his credo of Nature and Matter as the *only* truth and on all who disbelieve or believe in other things he pours scorn as unenlightened morons and superstitious half-wits. I bear him no grudge for thinking me that, but I note that this attitude is not confined to religious faith but is equally natural to those who are free from religious faith and do not believe in Gods and Gurus. You will not, I hope, mind my putting the other side of the question; I want to point out that there *is* the other side, that there is much more to be said than at first sight appears."

Another trait of his character impressed me even though with time I came to take it for granted, as it were. It was his reluctance to impose his views on others. He seemed almost always like pleading for his case, even when it was obvious that the other's was untenable if only from the point of view of logic. To give one instance. A princess once came to the Ashram as my guest. She was fond of music and asked me to sing to her. I readily agreed and told her that I would have a regular musical *soirée* for her the



next evening. Next morning her secretary came to me and asked a number of searching questions in the course of which he gave me to understand that the princess could not possibly sit in the same room with other *sadhakas* whereupon I bluntly retorted: "Tell her then that she need not come. For I feel very strongly that this is not her State but an Ashram where we all have the same status, and so if she insists on being received with special deference I must decline to sing to such a person."

Next morning she called on me in person, wanting to explain. But I refused to see her. This was reported to Gurudev by a busybody who was aghast that I should have been impolite if not insulting to a rich and beautiful princess! Gurudev, however, smiled and sent word to me that not only was I right in my stand but that I had his full support, because every *sadhaka* had a perfect right to solitude if and when he did not feel like receiving visitors. (The princess came after all and I sang to her as she explained that it was all due to an unfortunate misunderstanding engineered by the same busybody).

But it so happened that a few months later a *gurubhai* was rude to a visitor. I quickly forgot my own similar misdemeanour and wrote to Gurudev condemning the delinquent out of hand. I asked whether spiritual realisation ought not to make people humble and courteous rather than rude and boorish. This time he reprimanded me politely, but firmly:

"But when on earth were politeness and good society manners considered as a part or a test of spiritual experience



or true yogic *siddhi*. It is no more a test than the capacity of dancing well or dressing nicely. Just as there are very good and kind men who are boorish and rude in their manners, so there may be very spiritual men (I mean here by spiritual men those who have had deep spiritual experiences) who have no grasp over physical life or action (many intellectuals too, by the way, are like that) and are not at all careful about their manners. I suppose I myself am accused of rude and arrogant behaviour because I refuse to see people, do not answer letters, and a host of other misdemeanours. I have heard of a famous recluse who threw stones at anybody coming to his retreat because he did not want disciples and found no other way of warding off the flood of candidates. I at least would hesitate to pronounce that such people had no spiritual life or experience. Certainly, I prefer that *sadhakas* should be reasonably considerate towards each other, but that is for the rule of collective life and harmony, not as a *siddhi* of the Yoga or an indispensable sign of inner experience.

"And then how can the *écarts* of the *sadhakas* here, none of whom has reached perfection or is anywhere near it, be a proof that spiritual experience is null? You write as if the moment one had any kind of spiritual experience or realisation, one must at once become a perfect person without defects or weaknesses. That is to make a demand which it is impossible to satisfy and it is to ignore the fact that spiritual life is a growth and not a sudden and inexplicable miracle. No *sadhaka* can be judged as if he were already a *siddha* Yogi, least of all

those who have only travelled a quarter or less of a very long path as is the case with most who are here. Even great Yogis do not claim perfection and you cannot say that because they are not absolutely perfect, therefore their spirituality is false or of no use to the world. There are, besides, all kinds of spiritual men: some who are content with spiritual experience and do not seek after an outward perfection or progress, some who are saints, others who do not seek after sainthood, others who are content to live in the cosmic consciousness in touch or union with the All but allowing all kinds of forces to fly through them, e.g. in the typical description of the Paramhansa. The ideal I put before our Yoga is one thing but it does not bind all spiritual life and endeavour. The spiritual life is not a thing that can be formulated in a rigid definition or bound by a fixed mental rule; it is a vast field of evolution, an immense kingdom potentially larger than the other kingdoms below it, with a hundred provinces, a thousand types, stages, forms, paths, variations of the spiritual ideal, degrees of spiritual advancement. It is from the basis of this truth which I will explain in subsequent letters that things regarding spirituality and its seekers must be judged, if they are to be judged with knowledge. It is only by so understanding it that one can understand it truly, either in its past or in its future or put in their place the spiritual men of the past and the present or relate the different ideals, stages, etc. thrown up in the spiritual evolution of the human being."

But as he knew to his cost what human nature was and

how liable to be heading for disaster in its cussed moods, he always tried to efface promptly the aftermath of a *froissement* which even a gentle correction often brought in its train. So time and again he came out with the salve of his humour and irony after having dealt a blow. I could not help admiring this as a token of his unfailing understanding of the hurdles of the ego we had to negotiate when, willy-nilly, we had to accept an unpalatable dressing-down for the purge of our egoism. For example, after one such gentle rebuke he went out of his way to plead for his inability to finish two promised letters in the small hours of the morning—one for myself and one for a friend of mine whom I had sponsored.

"The lights went out, the lights went out!" he hastened to write on the following morning. "So I have to wait till tomorrow. Man proposes but the Pondicherry Municipality disposes. But there will be grace tomorrow, Pondicherry Municipality *volente*." Then he went on to add the same night: "Joy! Joy! Joy!!! I have done it—both letters written—done they are this time."

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But in spite of all the latitude he gave me, I found corrections hard to bear as I was hypersensitive by constitution. Consequently he had to spare me and often weigh his words in a way he would not even dream of doing when dealing with, say, Nirod or Rajani. For he knew that these would not mind whatever it was that came to them from him. To



each according to his need, as he explained to me once in answer to a question of mine about consistency.

"It is a little difficult," he wrote, "from the wider, spiritual outlook to answer your question in the way you want and every mental being wants, with a trenchant 'Thou-shalt' or 'Thou-shalt-not'—especially when the *thou* is meant to cover *all*. For while there is an identity of essential aim, while there are general broad lines of endeavour, yet there is not in detail one common set of rules in inner things that can apply to *all* seekers. You ask: 'Is not such and such a thing harmful?' But what is harmful to one may be helpful to another; what is harmful under certain conditions may be helpful under other conditions; what is done in a certain spirit may be disastrous, while the same thing done in a different spirit would be innocuous or even beneficial. I asked the Mother what she would say to your question about pleasures and social experiences (put as a general question) and she answered: 'Impossible to say like that: it depends on the spirit in which it is done.' So there are many things: the spirit, the circumstances, the person, the need and cast of the nature.....that is also the reason why we say that the Divine cannot be understood by the mind, because the mind acts according to hard and fast rules and standards, while the spirit sees the truth of all and the truth of each and acts variously according to its own comprehensive and complex vision. That is also why we say that no one can understand by his personal mental judgment the Mother's actions and reasons for action: it can only be understood by entering into the larger consciousness from



which she sees things and acts upon them. That is baffling to the mind because it uses its small mental measures, but that is the truth of the matter."

And I may add that that is also why he revealed at every step a new facet of his unfathomable personality to us all, to each according to his temperament. For example, to Nirod he would constantly assume a tone he never once assumed with me. To illustrate what I mean:

"Nirod," he wrote on one occasion, "as there are several lamentations today besieging me, I have very little time to deal with each separate jeremiad. But do I understand rightly that your contention is: 'I can't believe in the Divine doing everything for me because it is by my own mighty and often fruitless efforts that I write poetry and have made myself into a poet?' Well, that itself is *épatant*, magnificent and unheard-of! It has always been supposed since the infancy of the human race that while a verse-maker can be made or self-made, a poet cannot. *Poet a nascitur non fit*—a poet is born not made, is a dictum that has come down through the centuries and millenniums and was thundered into my ears by the first pages of my Latin grammar. The facts of literary history seem to justify this stern saying. But here in Pondicherry we have tried, not to manufacture poets, but to give them birth, a spiritual not a physical birth, into the body. In a number of instances we are supposed to have succeeded—one of them is your noble self, or if I am to believe the Man of Sorrows in you—your abject, miserable, hopeless and ineffectual self. But how was it done? There are two theories, it

seems: one that it was done by the Yogic Force, the other that it was done by your splashing, kicking, groaning Herculean efforts. Now, Sir, if it is the latter, if you have done the unprecedented thing, made yourself by your own laborious strength into a poet (for your earlier efforts were only very decent literary exercises), then, Sir, why the deuce are you so abject, self-depreciatory and miserable? Don't say that it is only a poet who can produce no more than a few poems in as many months. Even to have done that, to have become a poet at all, a self-made poet, is a miracle over which one can only say 'Bravo! Bravo!' without ever stopping. If your efforts could do that what is there that it can't do? All miracles can be effected by it and a giant, self-confident faith is the only logical conclusion. So either way, there is room only for Hallelujah, none for jeremiads.

"The fact that you don't feel a force does not prove that it isn't there. The steam engine does not feel a force moving it, but the force is there for all that. A man is not a steam engine? He is very little better, for he is conscious only of some bubbling on the surface which he calls 'himself' and is absolutely unconscious of all the subconscious, subliminal, superconscious forces moving him. (This is a fact which is being more and more established by modern psychology though it has got hold only of the lower forces and not the higher, so you need not turn up your rational nose at it). He twitters intellectually and foolishly about the surface results and attributes them all to his 'noble self', ignoring the fact that this noble self is hidden far

away from his own vision behind the cell of his dimly sparkling intellect and the reeling fog of his vital feelings, emotions, impulses, sensations and impressions. So your arguments are utterly absurd and futile. Our aim is to bring the secret forces out and unvalled into the open so that instead of getting some shadows or lightnings of themselves out through the veil or being wholly obstructed, they may pour down and flow in a river. But to expect all that at once is a presumptuous demand which shows an impatient ignorance and inexperience. If they begin to trickle at first, that is sufficient to justify the faith in the downpour. You admit that you once or twice felt a force coming down and delivering a poem out of you (your opinion about its worth or worthlessness is not worth a cent: that is for others to pronounce); that is sufficient to blow your jeremiad to smithereens; it proves that the force was and is there and at work and it is only your sweating Herculean labour that prevents you feeling it. Also it is the trickle that gives assurance of the possibility of the downpour. One has only to go on and by one's patience deserve the downpour or else, without deserving, slide on until one gets it. In Yoga itself the experience that is a promise and foretaste but gets shut off till the nature is ready for the fulfilment is a phenomenon familiar to every Yogi when he looks back on his past experience. Such were the brief visitations of *ananda* you have had sometimes before. It does not matter if you have not a 'leechlike tenacity'—leeches are not the only type of Yogis. If you can stick anyhow or get stuck—that is sufficient. The fact that you are not Sri Aurobindo



(who said you were?) is an inept irrelevance. One needs to be only oneself in a reasonable way and shake off the hump when it is there or allow it to be shaken off without clinging to it with a leechlike tenacity worthy of a better cause.

"All the rest is mere stuff of the *tamasic* ego. As there is a *rajasic* ego which shouts 'What a magnificent, powerful, sublime individual I am, unique and peerless!' (of course there are gradations in the pitch), so there is a *tamasic* ego which squeaks 'What an abject, hopeless, worthless, incapable, unendowed and uniquely impossible creature I am—all, all are great Aurobindos, Dilips, Xs but I, oh I, oh I!' That's your style. It is the *tamasic* ego (of course it expresses itself in various other ways at various times, I am only rendering your present pitch) which is responsible for the Man of Sorrows getting in. It's all bosh—stuff made up to excuse the luxury of laziness, melancholy and despair. You are in that state now because you have descended faithfully and completely into the inert die-in-the-muddiness of your physical consciousness which, I admit, is a specimen! But so after all is everybody's, only there are different kinds of specimens. What are you to do? Dig yourself out if you can; if you can't, call for ropes and wait till they come. If 'God knows what will happen when the Grace descends', that should be enough, shouldn't it? That you don't know is a fact which may be baffling to your—well, your intelligence but is not of great importance,—any more than your supposed unfitness. Whoever was fit, for that matter—fitness and unfitness are only a way of speaking, man is in his nature unfit and



a misfit (so far as things spiritual are concerned) in his outward nature. But within there is a soul and above there is Grace. That is all you know or need to know. And, if you don't, well, even then you have at least stumbled into the path and have got to remain here till you get haled along it far enough to wake up to knowledge. Amen!

"By the way, what is this story about my four or five hours' concentration for several years before anything came down? Such a thing never happened if by concentration you mean laborious meditation. What I did was four or five hours' *pranayam*—which is quite another matter. And what flow do you speak of? The flow of poetry came down while I was doing *pranayam*—not some years afterwards. If it is the flow of experiences, that did come some years, but after I had stopped the *pranayam* for a long time and was doing nothing and did not know what to do or where to turn once all my efforts had failed. And it came not as a result of years of *pranayam* or concentration, but in a ridiculously easy way, by the Grace of a temporary Guru—but it was not even that, for he was himself bewildered by it—or by the Grace of the eternal Brahman and afterwards by the Grace of Mahakali and Krishna. So don't try to turn me into an argument against the Divine: that attempt will be perfectly ineffective."

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But though he could go on like this, reminiscing and scintillating if and when the spirit so moved him, few

people who have known<sup>r</sup> him will disagree with my estimate that he was essentially a man of deep reserve, a denizen of the deeps. It reminds me of a joke I had with him nearly fifteen years ago. On three (and later four) occasions in the year when he used to come out for us as well as the visitors, we used to take a look at him, but not, alas, a long look. His eyes rested on each of us but for a few seconds—because the whole procedure had to be concluded in about a couple of hours. On me he used to shed a kind glance but I searched in vain for a smile. I was, indeed, impressed by his grave face but I missed the smile of a friendly recognition which made to me all the difference in the world. When he came to know of my disappointment he did try to change but equally—in vain. At all events, that was my impression, I insisted. But a lady who happened to be next to me (and who could, without turning a hair, beat me in the game of insistence with a handicap) drove me to the wall asseverating that he *had* smiled at me. So I wrote to him more in shame than in sorrow. "O Guru! here you put me out of countenance once more—possibly to pulverize the last vestiges of my self-confidence. For Lady Emphatic swears—and none can outswear her, as you know—that she saw your lips bend into a curve which can only be equated to a smile. So it follows, as the rain the drought, that I have forfeited even the right to believe in the testimony of my own senses, or is it that you only gave me a Supramental smile? If so, why did you waste such a boon on us, humans, whose mentality cannot possibly recognise it as such?"

To that he wrote back: "But Lady Emphatic is right. For I did indeed smile to you though it was not the broad smile of a Tagore or the childlike smile of a Gandhi. But I assure you I will try to be more convincing in future." (He did later—and succeeded, God be praised!)

But when—and here is my point—even his smile had to be warmly mooted before one could be convinced as to its authenticity, how could one call him anything but a reserved man?

And yet he was talking to me as to a "friend and a son" and to Nirod like an old comrade whom he almost invited to give him as much as he got! This I found a little difficult to account for and yet I feel I can safely assert that when he wrote his letters to us two, it did seem as though a lid had been suddenly lifted: the old trite simile of a stone-slab covering a natural spring often recurred to my mind! Somehow, with us two he was as free as free can be. But today I cannot help feeling somewhat conscience-stricken because I realise that I could not rightfully claim what I clamoured for, namely, utter frankness on his part: I have become conscious as never before, that my way of reacting to his frankness was nowhere near what it ought to have been.

For what was it that did happen as against what could and ought to have happened? It would not, indeed, be untrue to claim that I had come to serve him, having previously responded to his call for self-transformation. But in the uphill path of Yoga a mere pious intention does not, alas, carry one very far: one has to be resolutely ruth-



less with one's ego if one really wants to be sincere to a purpose. I have, all along taken not a little pride in my honesty and sincerity, little realising that the truly honest aspirant in Yoga is he alone who is sleeplessly self-critical, who is bent on giving no quarter to the promptings of his self-will—that everlasting pander of self-love. Today when the one whose deep compassion was so eager to help me out of the ego's clutches is no more, this thought has become fraught with an added poignancy in that it has enabled me to see clearly how I *could* have reacted to his tireless exhortations to outgrow my egotism if only I *would*—by choosing to be a little more docile and humble. But perhaps it was my overweening self-confidence harnessed to an ineradicable pride in the sanity of my rational nature and demands that wrought my downfall again and again. (Isn't our rational pride even blinder than purblind faith?) To give a rather convincing instance if only to illustrate how I hampered him at every turn by constraining him to waste his precious time for the redemption of the Old Adam in me:

"I got your first letter," he wrote once in the heyday of my self-will, "and as I always look at yours if there is any and leave the rest aside for later reading, I sat down after my daily walk and concentration to answer it. I missed your second 'urgent' letter altogether and came to know of it after I had seen the third—later in the night. If I had had it, I would of course have answered it at once. I am sorry you have had to wait the whole night without an answer.



"I was a little taken aback by the first letter, for my remarks about W had been perfectly casual and I attached little importance to them when I wrote them. I would certainly not have written them if I had thought they were of a kind to cause trouble to you. In scribbling them I had no idea of imposing my views about W on you—I had no idea of writing as a Guru to a disciple or laying down the law, it was rather as a friend to a friend expressing my ideas and discussing them with a perfect ease and confidence. Both the Mother and myself have a natural tendency to speak or write to you in that way, expressing the idea that comes without measuring of terms or any *arrière-pensée* because we feel close to your psychic being always and that is the relation we have quite naturally with you. That was why I wrote like that and I had no other intention in me.

"I do not believe in human judgments because I have always found them fallible—also because I have myself been so blackened by human judgments that I do not care to be guided by them with regard to others. All this, however, I write to explain my own point of view; I am not insisting on it as a law for others. I have not been in the habit of insisting that everybody must think as I do—any more than I insist on everybody following me and my Yoga.

"All that to brush aside what is an evident misunderstanding. Now about X Y Z, you should remember that what I wrote about them was not an after-invention or an idea formed as a result of their going away—all that I

wrote about X, for instance, I had written long before he went—and also with the others I had not refrained from letting them know what was wrong with them, except for Y and Z with whom it was not necessary. I did not wholeheartedly assure and praise and encourage while they were there nor wholeheartedly damn when they were gone. Nor would I have said anything about them if I had not been questioned from every side. Why then should you think that I would attack you if you went away—you, to whom I have always spoken with encouragement and kindness, and never, I think, with severe disapprobation or warning as I did with X Y Z? I should write, if I had to write, what I have always said to you: 'Dilip had his difficulties, and he was gradually surmounting them, but his one great difficulty of doubt and self-distrust he did not meet sufficiently'; and I would add: 'and in a weak moment he has allowed it to carry him away. But he will find that he can discover his soul here alone and then he will return.'

"But all that is really unnecessary since you are not, like X Y Z, consumed with the desire to go or feeling the call for action elsewhere. But why this constant slipping back to the idea of failure? Why this idea that I am offended? Have I ever taken offence or evinced any least idea of giving you up? How is it you still lend credence to a suggestion your whole experience of our relations contradicts? Your attacks of doubt and self-distrust are a weakness I have taken account of and I refuse to consider it as a bar to your arrival at the goal. It is in all sincerity that I affirm your possibilities."

But as the blackest clouds have a silver lining, I console myself today with this thought that even my wrongest moods did serve a twofold purpose: first, objectively, because they brought into relief his great understanding of and compassion for human nature which insists, suicidally, on smiting the hand that comes to save (an understanding that had made him write once to me: "My experience shows that human beings are much less deliberate and responsible for their acts than the moralists, novelists and dramatists make them and I look rather to see what forces drove them than what the man himself may have seemed by inference to have intended or purposed—our inferences are often wrong and even when they are right touch only the surface of the matter") and then subjectively, because it can hardly be gainsaid that had I been by nature less intractable than I was, I might, indeed, have been richer today in Yogic experience, but should I not have been ever so much poorer in my intimate knowledge of that human side of him which is so infinitely precious to me: the human in the Divine that made Krishna what He was to the grateful Pandavas—not only the Guru and Pilot but the Friend and Sentinel as well who all but broke his pledge in the Kurukshetra and sprang out to slay Bhishma when he found his protégé Arjuna's life in danger? A Muslim friend of mine recited once a Persian couplet which I translated in one of my bright moods of gratefulness and exaltation which made me feel vividly that even failure in a great endeavour was far preferable to success in little ambitions:



When I waste my years to win thee, friend,  
'Tis then I best achieve my end:  
Only that life was rich in gain  
Which strove and strove for thee in vain.

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And it was just such another exalted mood of mine inspired by my gratefulness for the right to his indulgence which evoked, to my joy, one of his rarest sallies—a mood, alas, which his life-long preoccupation with us, dolorous dwarfs, made it all but impossible for him to give vent to more often. I shall quote it not only to end on a happy note but also for the sheer delight of revealing him in an impulse of unbridled laughter and fun which will, I hope, be welcome to all who cherish the memory of his lovelit personality. It happened like this.

It was in 1934, a few days before his birthday, the 15th August. I was reading out to Chadwick a letter of his which he had just written to me in answer to my importunities.

"Sonnets?" he wrote. "I have no time for writing sonnets—my energy is too occupied with very urgent and pressing things—quite apart from correspondence—to 'dally with the rhythmic line'."

We were both cursing away in our hearts the utter wryness of this providential dispensation and wondering about the nature of his "pressing" work in hand when Gurudev's secretary brought me a telegram to Gurudev which read: "Wire permission for your Darshan on the fifteenth of





Work he abhorred, yet such is fate—he was given a mill to  
supervise,  
But he resigned and married pelf—not less resourceful than  
he was wise!  
It is not likely—but who knows—perhaps your mystic call  
he hears!  
And, sick at last of the world's brief tinkles, aches for the  
music of the spheres!

Then number two: he'd fallen in love with one he  
called 'his dream of love  
Come true on earth'—but she, alas, proved subtle whom  
no romance could move.  
She smiled on him as Frau von Stein once smiled on Goethe:  
did not she  
Invite the Poet?—but then "Oh no, not too close," said she  
warningly!  
Only, while Goethe had for his flame to pay in poems, not  
in gold:  
This modern 'Pickwick' gave her with his 'love-sick' heart  
his cash untold.  
Then, bankrupt, hugging me in London blubbered he  
between his tears:  
"O kindred spirit, who but you can ever divine what my  
heart sears?"  
You never can tell—perhaps he has since read your message  
of the One

Who can tell why love is doomed to dark and never a  
place wins in the sun?

Your namesake number three, a youth who lived in Paris  
by his wits,  
Took me in tow and showed me round the Eternal city's  
sweet retreats.

A specialist in gossip about prophets, poets and actresses,  
"What is unknown to me," he bragged, "is not worth  
while—I know what pays."

And he made me know it too although I did pay what I  
could for him,  
As he would clarify what to my mind had seemed  
intriguing, dim.

Maybe his "knowledge" has let him down and so he longs  
for a greater light  
Than his continental firefly twinkles—helpless in his soul's  
dark night!

The last though not the least, O Guru, of your namesakes  
was so brave

That we all stood aghast when, after lecturing "each his  
soul must save",

He wooed a Belgian old maid who though not so wise as  
Solomon

Was even as rich and "game" when he led her to the altar  
in Boulogne.

I had to be his best man though no bridesmaids were  
available,  
But the great philosopher announced: "Without love even  
Heaven were hell!"  
So the saviour angel of his soul led him to the turf in a  
mystic glee  
And then in the heaven of Monte Carlo gambled and lost  
exultantly.  
I wonder: could his Eden elect have failed him in the last  
resort?  
Else how could his brave ship want now to come to your  
Supramental port?

I know not human destiny, nor your celestial mysteries.  
I only know your regal soul rich with the starry secrecies.  
So I implore: O make me see the greatness of your namesakes  
now,  
Say, how come they to bear your name and yet stay  
where they are—Oh how?  
Just one thing more: what shall I answer?—and please  
tell me his address.  
I dare not recommend all, Guru, though all *you* can lean to  
bless,  
And lastly O Compassionate, forgive my dread frivolity:  
To have laughed at those who bear your name? Oh, damn  
me not everlastingly.

Chadwick chuckled when I read this out to him, but shook his head. "It's unlikely to draw him out, Dilip," he sighed.



"He's too busy. But I do wish you the best of luck."

Next day, however, I ran to him, for the miracle did happen—Gurudev did reply.

"Dilip," we read together, "Your epic of the four Aurobindos is luminous, informing and hair-raising! But there can be no doubt about who this Aurobindo is—it is, I presume, Aurobindo the fourth, 'a doer of dreadful deeds'. I am referring to the phrase *bhimakarma Brikodara*,<sup>1</sup>—However a truce to unseemly jests; let us come to grave practical matters.

"His address? How in the name of the wonderful am I to know? His address in the telegram is 'Aurobindo, Bombay' just as mine might be 'Aurobindo, Pondicherry'. In his previous letter he wrote that he was going to Bombay and would waltz from there straight to Pondicherry. He may have given his Bombay address but I don't think so. Nolini who has his letter can perhaps enlighten you. I do not know whether he expects us to put him up—I suppose not, since although he is Aurobindo, Aurobindo does not know him from Adam. However, what I am doing is to send you his reply-paid telegram form and shove my responsibility on your shoulders. You will decide these according to the ripe wisdom of your many-Aurobindonian experience. Whether you wire 'come and be blessed' or 'stay where you are in your Eden'—is your shout—I back out. To sum the matter up in two far-flowing Alexandrine couplets:

<sup>1</sup> From Sanskrit, meaning literally: "wolf-belly of dreadful deeds."

Tell him, by wire: 'Come on' with a benignant nod,  
Or leave him journeying to the devil or to God,  
Decide for the other Aurobindo what you please,  
This namesake-flooded Aurobindo leave at ease.

"In fact my Supermind is almost staggering helpless to make any decision under the weight of all these Aurobindos and others. I am told there will be 400 of them in families and singles apart from the 200 who are here, and so unless the divine mercy descends with a greater force than the 'gentle dew' from Heaven, we may be still there receiving people till past three o'clock in the afternoon. So one Aurobindo more or less can make no difference to me. It is you who will rejoice or suffer—according as he falls on you like a ton of bricks or envelopes you like a soothing zephyr in the spring.

"But look at the irony of human decisions and human hopes. My father who wanted all his sons to be great men—and succeeded in a small way with three of them—in a sudden inspiration gave me the name Aurobindo, till then not borne by anyone in India or the wide world, that I might stand out unique among the great by the unique glory of my name. And now look at the swarm of Aurobindos with their mighty deeds in England, Germany and elsewhere! Don't tell me it is my fault because of my indiscretion in becoming famous. When I went to the National College in the Swadeshi days which was my first public step towards the ignominies of fame, there was already an Aurobindo Prakash waiting for me there with the sar-

donic comment of the gods printed on his learned forehead. Aurobindo Prakash, indeed!

"As for the explanation, your epic of the four Aurobindos has suddenly revealed to me why the name Aurobindo has spread and why its bearers are heading for Pondichery. I have it—eureka! And I am released from all *kshobha*<sup>1</sup> at the violated uniqueness of my name. Your description shows that each Aurobindo represents a world-type and it is of the conglomeration and sublimation of great world-types that the supramental-terrestrial will be made. You may not have appreciated their greatness, but that is not their fault. Also the formula for the Supramental may sound to you too chemical like the formula for a patent medicine, but there it is. Incidentally, I am more convinced than ever that you lived and wrote and sighed ('I am between tears and sighs', said Maecenas as he sat between the weak and watery-eyed Virgil and the aesthetic Horace) under Augustus Caesar. You have kept the spirit and turn and most even of the manner.

"Your 'epistolary frivolity' was all right. There is laughter in the Kingdom of Heaven, though there may be no marriage there."

<sup>1</sup> Chagrin

## CHAPTER XII

### SRI AUROBINDO VIS-A-VIS SRI KRISHNAPREM

It is not often that highly-evolved personalities meet and react favourably to each other. History affords us but rare instances of friendship between eminent men. We have indeed on record that Carlyle and Emerson were friends and mutual admirers of one another as also were Goethe and Schiller. But in my own life, though I have met many great personalities in different climes, it is only rarely that I have seen them coming truly near each other—with any inner affinity. Admiration—yes, but not that psychic sympathy, that indescribable flow of two temperaments towards each other, one welcoming the contact of the other, which results in the ultimate enrichment of either. In fact the opposite instance is much too common: great men somehow do not hit it off well together, so much so that we almost feel like complaining, because we might profit more by history if the great men, through real friendship, could interact on one another to their mutual advantage. Let me give an example from personal experience. My father, Dwijendra Lal Roy, was a great dramatist, poet, satirist and composer and was, moreover, a striking personality. So also was Rabindranath Tagore. Naturally, I admired my father more, but that did not prevent me from



admiring the other, Tagore, with whom he simply could not walk arm in arm three steps though he tried hard enough. The same psychological maladjustment was responsible for Tagore's aloofness from his great contemporary. Yet neither could help paying homage to the genius of the other before they parted company as well as after.

For all that, they were not friends; they could not be. There is, I suppose, something in a genius which makes him a little difficult to get on with, and this difficulty appreciably increases when one genius has, by force of circumstances, to come close to another. They may indeed draw near but only to rebound away, each becoming, ironically, more critical of the other's defect and less conscious of his own angularities vis-à-vis the other. So it was that my father and Tagore fell out after only a few years' contact and that in spite of a genuine admiration for each other. I know that each wanted to be friends with the other but felt as Rousseau did towards Voltaire whose hostility was cordially reciprocated by the latter. For instance here is the compliment Voltaire paid to Rousseau:

"I have received your new book against the human race, and thank you for it. Never was such cleverness used in the design of making us all stupid. One longs, on reading your book, to walk on all fours. But as I have lost that habit for more than sixty years, I feel, unhappily, the impossibility of resuming it."

Which was returned by Rousseau with compound interest when he wrote to his doughty antagonist (1760): "I hate

you, in fact, since you have so willed it; but I hate you like a man still worthier to have loved you, if you had willed it. Of all the sentiments with which my heart was full towards you, there only remain the admiration that we cannot refuse to your fine genius and love for your writings. If there is nothing in you that I can honour but your talents, that is no fault of mine."

Fortunately for us, this distance or incompatibility seems to decrease when we come to the realm of the spirit. I do not suggest that here the clash is obviated and sympathy developed because there is no difference. It is a strange thing—but nonetheless true, as experience will attest—that though spiritual evolution is inversely proportional to the diminution of the ego, the resulting humility does not make for the loss of personality but rather its deeper accentuation. So although it would be certainly true to say, e.g. that Shankaracharya had much in common with Vivekananda, yet it would be equally true to say that they differed also from each other in many of their fundamental reactions to life and things in general. Which would be equally true of the evolution of say Nanak and Kabir, Christ and Krishna, and in our day Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Aurobindo. Each of these manifested a remarkable personality and it would not be difficult to underline the common measure of agreement between them, individually. But the difference also exists and it is a difference too important to be ignored. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me criticizing the catholic view (so much admired today by the so-called broad-minded) that Krishna and Christ are

the same. "But though Christ and Krishna are the same", he wrote, "they are the same in difference, that is indeed the utility of so many manifestations instead of there being only one, as these missionaries would have it."

Nevertheless—and here is my point—one cannot conceive of Christ belittling Krishna or Sri Aurobindo running down Sri Ramakrishna. For men of authentic spirituality, when they attain to a certain stature, do exhibit, generally, a marked tolerance and understanding. They see something the common man—who is so tenaciously attached to the ego's blinkers—does not see and what they have seen profoundly changes not only their outlook on the world but their reactions to life as well. They cease to hanker for what is coveted by all, and even when they love they do not want to possess or dominate—they become in fact like the One they have grown to love, since (to quote the great mystic St. John of the Cross) "he that loves becomes one with the object of his love". They do not need to depreciate others in order to grow richer in self-appreciation. In consequence, each of them, even while he emphasises his own message as the outcome of his native vision, can pay generously unto Caesar what is Caesar's and yet stay loyal to what he is commanded to execute, become what he is invited to become and lastly, act on life in the way he must, impelled by a recondite motive and an inner inexorable necessity. It is in consequence of this profound inner change that he can hail even those whose message and mission happen to be different from his own.



This came home to me rather vividly in my life in the refreshing example of Krishnaprem or rather in the spectacle of his bowing down in humble reverence to Sri Aurobindo even though there could be no question of his accepting the latter as his Guru. In fact once, from Almora, he wrote to me years ago, in reply to my invitation, that although he had the deepest reverence for Sri Aurobindo, he did not feel like coming to Pondicherry since he could get all the inspiration he needed from his own Guru. A little hurt by this, I went to the Mother with his letter. To my surprise, however, she was greatly pleased and told me that that was the "ideal attitude for any *sadhaka* who had already accepted a Guru—to stick to him and turn to no other." Sri Aurobindo also wrote to me (when Krishnaprem himself contended that all true Gurus were the same):

"All true Gurus are the same, the one Guru, all are the one Divine. That is a fundamental and universal Truth which justifies Krishnaprem's statement. But there is also a truth of difference; the Divine dwells in different personalities with different minds, teachings and influences so that He may lead different disciples with their special need, character and destiny by different ways to the realisation: that justifies Krishnaprem's own action. Because all Gurus are the same Divine, it does not follow that the disciple does well if he leaves the one meant for him to follow another. Fidelity to the Guru is demanded of every disciple, according to Indian tradition. Krishnaprem has that fidelity; he feels the spiritual tie holding him to his Guru in life and even after her departure; that is why



he cannot think of going to someone else. 'All are the same' is a spiritual truth, but you cannot convert it indiscriminately into action: you cannot deal with all persons in the same way because they are the one Brahman: if one did, the result, pragmatically, would be an awful mess. You yourself have always in your heart laid stress on the principle of fidelity; Krishnaprem does the same; so you ought to find it easy to understand his standpoint. It is a rigid mental logic that makes the difficulty, but in spiritual matters mental logic easily blunders; intuition, faith and a plastic spiritual reason are here the only guides."

A few years later Krishnaprem visited our Ashram at Pondicherry and he responded warmly to Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's spiritual touch and blessings. And he made a very characteristic gesture which I shall never forget, a gesture of simple sincerity with a charm all his own. It was in November, 1948. I took him up to Mother and introduced him to her. He knelt down to her and said that he had come for her blessings that he might give himself without reserve to his Guru and Krishna. Mother held his eyes for nearly a minute.

"But you *have* given yourself", she said.

"Not enough", he answered.

Mother told us subsequently that his words had made a deep impression on her; and yet he had spoken but a few words!

He then went to tour South India and visited the famous temple of Sri Rangam where he had a marvellous experience amounting to a revelation. Meanwhile I appealed to

Gurudev to write to me in a few lines his impression of Krishnaprem when he had come to pay his respects to him at *darshan*. He wrote back:

"I do not quite know what to write in the few lines you asked from me nor how to write it. Perhaps I could only repeat from my side what he himself said about 'establishing a contact'. But a spiritual contact cannot be easily defined in mental terms, they are usually insufficient to express it. If it is some impressions about himself or his spiritual person or his more outward personality that you are thinking of, there too I find it difficult to put it into language; these things in a moment like that are felt rather than thought out and it may not be easy to throw them into mental terms at once. Perhaps the only thing I could say is that they have confirmed and deepened and made more living the impressions I had already formed about him from his letters to you and what came through them and from such psychical contact as I had already made from a distance, *for the contact itself is not distant*. You know very well the value I have always put upon his insight into spiritual things, the brilliance and accuracy of his thought and vision and his expression of them (I think I described it once as *pashyanti vak*<sup>1</sup>) and on as much as I knew of his

<sup>1</sup> "It was a great refreshment to read the letters of Krishnaprem; one feels here a stream from the direct sources of Truth that one does not meet so often as one could desire. Here is a mind that can not only think but see—and not merely see the surface of things with which most intellectual thought goes on wrestling without end or definite issue, and as if there were nothing else, but look into the core. The Tantriks

spiritual experience and constant acquisition and forward movement and many-sided largeness. A closer perception of the spiritual person behind that is something more than a mental impression. I think this is all I can write at present and I hope it will be enough for you."

I showed this letter triumphantly to many of my friends who admired Krishnaprem and posted copies of it to many more even though I knew that he would never approve of such publicity. But I, in my turn, having an equal, almost congenital, aversion to being gagged, had to fight for my *raison-d'être*. So I used to quote for his edification the great simile of Sri Ramakrishna: "There are two types of men: one goes to a mango-grove and comes back happy but remains mute; the other comes back and directs all and sundry to the matchless orchard. I belong to the second category, that is why I tell you that I *have* tasted God and as such *can* testify to His matchless savour which you, too, can verify if only you *will*."

"So", I used to plead, "I too want to tell those who want to meet an authentic devotee but meet only mountebanks,

have a phrase, *Pashyanti Vak*, to describe one level of the *Vakshakti*, (verbal expression) the seeing Word. Krishnaprem has, it seems to me, much of the *Pashyanti Buddhi*, the seeing Intelligence. It might be because he has passed beyond thought into experience, but there are many who have a considerable wealth of experience without its clarifying their eye of thought to this extent; the soul feels but the mind goes on with mixed and imperfect transcriptions, blurs and confusions in the idea. There must have been the gift of right vision lying ready in his nature." (He wrote this in 1932; the letter has been printed in full in my *Among the Great*, American Edition, pp. 288-293).



that the purest gold of spirituality glitters indeed even in our dismal age, but not in the open show-windows which catch the eyes of all and sundry."

My preface has perhaps grown a little too long but as I fear Krishnaprem is likely to read what I am going to write, I must avail myself of all the armours I can requisition to fend off what is in store for me.

#### THE FIRST PHASE OF HIS SADHANA

It was, I think, about the beginning of 1923—when I was staying in Lucknow with Professor D.P. Mukerji—that we were asked to tea by the famous poet-composer, Atul Prasad Sen. I can still recapture in my memory the radiant face of a young Englishman of about my age sitting, a pipe in his mouth, on a sofa. The Poet said to me: "This is Ronald Nixon, Dilip, our brilliant Professor—an English Hindu or a Hindu Englishman if you like."

We laughed and the person at whose expense we made merry outlaughed us all. Needless to say I fell in love with him at first sight and, when I returned with Dhurjati to his lodging, I told him how I had recalled an old passage from Marlowe: "Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

#### THE SECOND PHASE

We met here and there. I used to sing everywhere and Nixon (as we called him then) liked my music, especially



my hymns to Krishna. I visited Lucknow once or twice a year and felt so happy because he was there. His contact was delightful, conversation illuminating and faith in Hinduism inspiring. I used to listen with rapt attention when he discussed the Vedas, the Gita, the Tantra etc.—notably with a savant, Sri Jagadish Chatterji. When the “intellectuals” were not there, I used to put questions to him and he answered with his luminous clarity and contour. I often kept notes of these talks. Once he said:

“Europe never forgets, Dilip, that bread is necessary, only she forgets too easily that man does not live by bread alone. But you, as a Hindu, should not adopt the European as your Guru for showing you the way since it has been shown you by your own great ancestors ages ago. Remember Krishna:

*Manmanā bhava madbhaktah madyāji mām namaskuru  
Māmevaishyasi satyam te pratijāne priyosi me.”*

This he translated himself in his ‘Yoga of Bhagavatgita’ thus: ‘Fix thy mind on Me, give thy heart’s love to Me, consecrate all thy actions to My service, hold thine own self as nothing before Me. To Me then shalt thou come, truly I promise for thou art dear to Me.’

He used to be a great admirer in those days of Buddha, Krishna, the mystic in Lawrence, the *Tantras*, the *Gita* (he read the *Bhagavat* years later) and the Upanishads. One day our talk centred round Sri Aurobindo when he said, in passing, that Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Essays on the Gita’ had

made the deepest impression on his mind and that he had never come across a better exegesis of the Threefold Path of Krishna. *It was this casual remark of his which was to revolutionize my life within the next few years.* But the call to Sri Aurobindo, the epoch-maker, was yet to come. Meanwhile I toured in search not of the Last Musician but art songs and wrote to Krishnaprem from time to time just to keep in touch with him.

The only letter of his I still have of this period—I regret I have lost the rest—is from Lucknow, dated, 22nd January, 1927. As I have printed it in full in my 'Among the Great' (American Edition, pp. 263-265) I will only quote here the closing paragraph:

"For myself, Dilip, though I can be tolerant to all countries, I have only one, and that, strange to say, is not England but India. What I feel is that the wealth of tradition which is a nation is too precious a thing to be merged into a common hotch-potch from London to Yokohama. If we confine ourselves to Europe (at least Western Europe) the case is somewhat different as the traditions are more or less common; but can England and India, say, be mixed so philanthropically without doing vital injury to both? *When the traditions of a nation die, then the nation is dead*, even if it persists as a great Power in the world, yet it is nothing but an aggregate of meaningless individuals determinedly pursuing their contemptible aims. History is a symbol, and what that symbol signifies is something infinitely more precious than a mere peddling adherence to a sequence of so-called facts. There is only one root fact anywhere, and

that is the Eternal One. Whatever helps to reveal Him *is* a fact, and whatever helps to hide Him *is* a lie even if all the fools in the world affirm it."

After that he turned more and more towards Krishna till he came to accept Him as his *Ishta* about the middle twenties, I believe, when he took initiation from his Guru, Yashoda Ma. I may be wrong here about the date—and he will not tell me if I ask as he resents publicity—but I remember having heard from him once that he had turned first towards Buddha, then towards the Vedanta till in the end he surrendered—to quote his own words—"at the feet of his Guru the burden of all that the world counts valuable in order to find the hidden treasure for which most men have no eyes". And it came about like this.

He told me about this time that he had taken a Guru but as he seemed rather reticent, I left it at that. But his men friends kept on speculating about his future and the ladies gossiping about his intentions: so many rich fathers of nubile damsels wanted to open their hospitable houses to him; so and so wanted to smile sweetly on him—and so on: he was a theme which could and did induce Dame Gossip to glorify with her almost endless variations! I remember how we all used to chaff him and how he heartily laughed it all away till one day a round dozen of grave professors decided that it had ceased to be a laughing matter.

"You must persuade him not to do this mad thing," they appealed to me in a deputation, in deep alarm. "A Benares lecturer gets only about Rs. 300 a month, whereas he is getting here Rs. 800 already and it will increase in due



course to Rs 1200! To think that he should throw away such prospects for none—and for barren Benares, at that...!”

“You never told me you had decided to leave Lucknow for good!” I asked him that evening, when we were alone, in a tone of veiled complaint. “And they say you didn’t even think fit to consult them, your colleagues, about it.”

“Don’t take it amiss, Dilip,” he answered assuagingly. “I am sick of Lucknow and its gossips and didn’t want to stimulate the tongue-waggers any further. But consult them? For what? Their advice? Oh, what do they think I came here for? To build a career and ripen into an ideal pedagogue with a fat income and a glib tongue which lectures on things that do not matter and baulks at those which do? They are aghast, are they, because my pay in Benares is going to be halved! But I hardly need even that much. Besides, what I have to do with high living and academic honours, anyway? I came here to realise something, you know, and that something is *not* worldly success!”

I have put it all in my own language but he did get animated that evening till he said something I shall never forget. “They say, these wise men, that since the World-maker you cannot see, therefore make the most of the world you have. But the world minus its Maker could be made the most of only in one way and its name, in one word, is *bloody*.”

And so he gave up his lectureship at Lucknow and went to Benares with his Guru, Yashoda Ma, whom he called his mother. When, subsequently, she retired to a temple-retreat in Almora, he accompanied her, resigning his Benares



post to become, finally, a mendicant in Krishna's name. I am not quite sure about the exact details, but I can clearly recall that on my next visit to Lucknow, in November 1928, his dear friend and mine, Joygopal, told me that he had taken to begging for his daily food in the streets of Almora!

The news came as a rude shock to me; for do what I would, I could never possibly go to this length. And yet surely it was not unheard of—especially in India where thousands of spiritual seekers and wandering mendicants lived on alms from day to day. I could not, indeed, help admiring his courage but, nevertheless, I felt not a little sad to imagine him actually going a-begging for his daily food. Neither could I dismiss from my mind his young shining face which mirrored his luminous soul. To think that the robust intellectual who drove on a motor-cycle at a break-neck speed through the streets of Lucknow with me in his side-car, should be literally going about from house to house begging for a bowl of rice and possibly turned away in some places by householders who looked upon such vagrants as harmful parasites of society! And then everything in Lucknow reminded me of him, his friends and mine, the University grounds where we had strolled together arm-in-arm, the tea-parties to which I had now to go without him, the musical soirées where I had to sing without his dear, eager presence—in short, every scene strongly reproached me for having stopped short where he had taken a leap out in the dark, trusting to the Divine Compassion alone to see to his safe landing. In the end his

absence began continually to haunt me insomuch that it would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that what he had achieved at one bound gave me just that decisive push I needed to go over the edge staking everything that does not matter for the one thing which does.

### THE THIRD PHASE

FROM November 1928 till March 1937 I lived in seclusion in Gurudev's Ashram at Pondicherry. During this time he wrote to me scores of letters many of which I published without his express permission. I feared of course that he would mind; but I implored him, when my fears proved true, to consider my standpoint which, I had felt, he approved of although he did his best to conceal his approval lest I go too far. My point is that the world often does not know its greatest men, thanks first, to a fundamental confusion of values and secondly, to a want of discernment. I told him about an apposite remark of Aldous Huxley in his *Along the Road*: "That it is difficult to tell the genuine from the sham is proved by the fact that enormous numbers of people have made mistakes and continue to make them. Genuineness always triumphs in the long run, but at any given moment the majority of people, if they do not actually prefer the sham to the real, at least like it as much, paying an indiscriminate homage to both." I wrote to him also what the Mother had told us one day in passing: that most people who called Sri Aurobindo great based their estimate on data which could not reveal the coral core of his greatness.

That is why, she had added, a true vision of what constitutes real greatness was indispensable especially to pilgrims on the path of the Spirit—to obviate lamentable mental muddles. About Krishnaprem's greatness I had never had a doubt, though my appreciation of him certainly deepened when Sri Aurobindo himself put his mighty seal on his sincerity, courage and seeing intelligence and wrote to us again and again giving him unstinted praise. To Chadwick he wrote once: "It was Krishnaprem's power to withdraw so completely from current thoughts and general tendencies and seek (for him) a new and abiding source of knowledge that impressed me as admirable. If he had remained interested and in touch with these current human movements, I do not suppose he would have done better with them than Romain Rolland or another. But he has got to the Yogic view of them, the summit view, and it is the readiness with which he has been able to do it that struck me as remarkable.

"I would explain his progressing so far by the quickness and completeness with which he has taken inwardly the attitude of the *bhakta* and the disciple. That is a rare achievement for a modern mind, be he European or *educated Indian*; for the modern mind is analytic, dubitative, instinctively *independent* even when it wants to be otherwise, and holds itself back and hesitates in front of the light and the influence that comes to it; it does not plunge into it with a simple directness, crying: '*Here I am ready to throw from me all that was myself or seemed to be, if so I can enter thee; remake my consciousness into the Truth in thy way,*



*the way of the Divine!* There is something in us that is ready for it but there is this element that intervenes and makes a curtain of non-receptivity; I know by my own experience with myself and others how long it can make a road that could never perhaps for us who seek the entire Truth have been short and easy, but still might have spared us many wanderings and standstills and recoils and detours. All the more I admire the ease with which Krishnaprem seems to have surmounted this formidable obstacle."

But though I often wonder whether I admire him more than I love him, neither my love nor my admiration could possibly persuade me to fall in with his desire that I should not pay the tribute due to his greatness simply because he disliked publicity. So in my Bengali book entitled *Abar Bhramyaman* (A Wanderer Again) I published a long article of about fifty pages on him. In this I gave a brief account of my talks with him in Almora (where I was his guest) as well as excerpts from his letters and wound up with a long poem on his spirituality. To conciliate him, however, I took good care to omit certain supraphysical happenings in his Ashram; but alas, he was not to be conciliated, which made me wish indeed that I had published what I kept back, seeing that he came down on me like a ton of bricks utterly failing to appreciate the mischief I might have done but had refrained only for his sake. But he again betrayed a heart of adamant.

"My dear Dilip," he wrote, "thanks so much for the book *Abar Bhramyaman* and also for the beautiful record of your Bhagavat hymn. But O Dilip, why did you write



about me and if at all, why so much? It's ill I fear, will be the result for me in the shape of letters and people wanting to visit such a 'curiosity'! What good will it do to you? Above all, you should not have hinted at the 'happenings': all these things only attract the mind of the foolish. I warn you that I shall deny it outright and say that it was just your eloquence! O Dilip, Dilip! I meant to go on scolding you for a dozen pages! But the milk is spilt and it is useless, so I will say no more. I begged you not to write about us but you just print my request and leave it at that! You are incorrigible and if you were anyone else I should hate you, but I can't!"

As this reassurance is rather heartening, I may venture to quote his letter in full since, on his own showing, the milk is spilt and that irretrievably. After commending me to the *Bhagvat* he gave me a support I needed rather badly at the time. What happened was this. I have always been a worshipper of Krishna since my boyhood days, and my subsequent study in the Ashram of the *Bhagavat* in Sanskrit gave a fillip to this old devotion and I wanted to equate my Guru with Him. Some *sadhakas*, who were not very friendly towards me, disapproved of this. So I went on writing to Sri Aurobindo soliciting repeatedly his verdict on my ineradicable penchant for that most elusive God. I need hardly expatiate on this as from the letters which follow the reader will be able to get a clear idea, I hope, of the uneasiness I was going through as well as Sri Aurobindo's great patience and catholicity which impelled him to reassure me on the point again and again:

18-6-43

"I thought I had already told you that your turn towards Krishna was not an obstacle. In any case I affirm that positively in answer to your question. If we consider the large and predominant part he played in my *sadhana*, it would be strange if the part he has in yours could be considered objectionable. 'Sectarianism' is a matter of dogma, ritual etc. not of spiritual experience; the concentration on Krishna is a self-offering to the Ishta Deva. *If you reach Krishna you reach the Divine; if you can give yourself to Him you can give yourself to me.* In any case it does not very much matter. We have accepted your loyalty and devotion, your work and service. *All else that is needed can come of itself afterwards.* There is nothing wrong in your self-offering in works and service; it is quite as it should be; you have no reason to feel worried about it. Don't be diffident. More resistance in difficulties and more faith in your spiritual destiny."

16-9-44

"As regards Krishna and devotion, I think I have already answered that more than once. I have no objection at all to the worship of Krishna or the Vaishnava form of devotion, nor is there any incompatibility between the Vaishnava *bhakti* and my Supramental Yoga. There is in fact no special and exclusive form of Supramental Yoga: all ways can lead to the Supermind, just as all ways can lead to the Divine.

"Certainly I will help you and am helping you and will always help you; the idea that I can stop doing it or will send you away (because of my ineradicable thirst for Krishna...D.) has no sense in it. If you persevere you cannot fail to get the permanent *bhakti* and the realisation you want but you should learn to put an entire reliance on Krishna to give it when he finds all ready and the time come. If he wants you to clear out imperfections and impurities first, that is after all understandable. I don't see why you should not succeed in doing it, now that your attention is being constantly turned on to it. To see them and acknowledge clearly is the first step.

17-9-44

"Certainly Krishna is credited with much caprice, difficult dealings and a playfulness (*lila!*) which the played-with do not always immediately appreciate. But there is reasoning as well as a hidden method in his caprices and when he does come out of it and takes a fancy to be nice to you, he has a supreme attractiveness, charm and allurements which compensate for all you have suffered. Of course your decision to continue the solitude has our full approval."

2-10-44

"What is there to comment on foolishness? It is a universal human failing. Your remark about Krishna was not

so much foolish as desperately illogical. (I wrote to Gurudev that I discovered *de nouveau* that I was foolish plus vain—D.) If Krishna was by nature cold and distant (Lord, what a discovery—Krishna of all people!) how could human devotion and aspiration come near him—he and it would soon be like the North and South Pole, growing icier and icier, always facing each other but never seeing because of the earth's bulge! Also if Krishna did not want the human *bhakti* as well as the *bhakta* wanting him, who could get at him? He would be always sitting on the snows of the Himalayas like Shiva!"

But the climax came when, to cap my discomfiture, a loyal adherent of Gurudev wrote me a letter gently admonishing me on my wrong mood. He advised me—doubtless with the friendliest of motives—to worship Sri Aurobindo and not Krishna. His reason was that if I approached Sri Aurobindo I could get Krishna easily en route for the Supramental, but if I worshipped Krishna, he could only lead me to the Overmental and not the still higher Supramental plateau because Krishna could only attain the Overmental but not the Supramental which only Sri Aurobindo could bring down. The long letter my friend penned wound up with a portentous warning to the effect that though Krishna was "included" in the Supramental, He could not include the Supramental in Himself! Duly I sent that letter up to Gurudev who wrote back to me:

"I am puzzled and perplexed by this affair of Krishna and



the Supermind. A. B. C. D. E. F. etc., of Bombay, Nagpur, and Delhi and P. Q. R. up to X. Y. Z. of Calcutta and Pondicherry will all be able to catch hold of its tail and 'include' it in themselves, only poor Krishna can't do it? He can only be himself 'included' in it? Hard lines on Bhagavan Vasudeva! What I said was that Krishna in *his* incarnation brought down the Overmind into human possibility, because that was his business *at the time* and all that could be done *then*; he did not bring down the Supermind, because that was not possible or at least not intended *at that stage of the human evolution*. I did not mean that he could not have brought down the Supermind if that had been willed at the time. You listen too easily to anybody, G. H. or Q. let us say, and treat their ingenious hairsplitting or unduly authoritative ideas as if they were gospel truths; that causes mental confusion. I believe Krishna's intentions are to remain with us and he won't run away when the Supermind comes down; so why should Mother and I send you away on his account? It would be a most illogical procedure. So that is that."

But as I dreaded nothing more than disloyalty, I asked Krishnaprem (to whom I was duly sending Gurudev's letters on Krishna) whether it would be disloyal or unwise on my part to want to realise Krishna through the Guru in the traditional Vaishnava way as this *sadhana* made a powerful appeal to my temperament. To that he wrote back:

"I think I said before but anyhow I repeat that when

your Guru allows, and more, encourages your *bhava* towards Krishna, there is no need whatever to worry about what others say or feel. All this talk of 'others' about your not being able to get this or that if you go that way is nonsense. There is nothing whatever that cannot be had at Krishna's feet. If your Guru did not support you I might hesitate to say this, as a path that is not sanctioned by one's Guru will never lead to success: however good in itself, it is *paradharma*. But in your case there is no question of that. It is clear from what he wrote to you that he was entirely satisfied with what you are doing. I may have said all this in my letter just after 'Ma' withdrew, but I can't remember what I wrote then and if so you must excuse the repetition.

"Doubtless there are many ways of getting beyond the mind because that is just where all ways that are ways have to go. I will speak of only two. One is to use the mind to negate the mind and so force the soul to pass beyond. That is the way of Nagarjuna and, though less unmixedly, of Shankara. It is a straight path but rather, like a path ruled out straight on a map, it takes no account of natural obstacles and so is very hard. In any case it is certainly not *anukula* for you. The other is by love and surrender. The contemplation of Krishna leads straight beyond the mind. I only realised the other day during a talk with a Vedanti friend, a very good *sannyasi* who is here now-a-days, how entirely beyond the mind the contemplation of Krishna is. To his arguments and questions as to how such and such could be true I could only reply that it undoubtedly was so. Every-

thing about Krishna is beyond the mind's grasp and I found that I could not accept any of the rational accommodations and compromises that his mind suggested. They were just inadequate. He too wanted to go beyond the mind but only in his own sober *philosophic* way. But why? There is nothing sober about Krishna. He maddens where He touches and so his worshippers leap where others—at least some others—can only walk, a dignified cap-and-gown sort of walk!

"But really what is all this fuss about? Some people disapprove of you? Well, let them. Even if they are *advanced sadhakas*, why should you care? You have no business with any approval or disapproval but that of Guru and Krishna. 'But,' you may say, 'they are my *gurubhais*'. Let them be, Gurus teach different things to different disciples. Never mind what he may have taught others. You do what he has taught *you*—Yours KRISHNAPREM."

I have quoted his letters without remorse or fear of hell (for betraying confidences) first because these, I felt, would help many a seeker to appreciate better the greatness of Gurudev, and secondly because Krishnaprem's devotion to his Guru could not but prove a flickerless beacon to hundreds who still groped in the dark in this age of barren scepticism. Also, shall I add that he has helped me and many another by not only instilling courage in our hours of despair but also by shedding on our waverings some glow of the steadfast flame he has lit in his heart by dint of his one-pointed *sadhana* and loyalty to his Guru. But there is still something else which I am simply unable to keep to myself: the high



praise Gurudev has bestowed on his outlook on things of the spirit. To illustrate what I mean I will now buttress my tribute with a few of his letters with Gurudev's comments thereon as these cannot but interest all genuine spiritual seekers who will, I hope, agree with me that it would have been utterly wrong to keep lights such as these under a bushel.

I need only say by way of preface that as he knew I was bent on publishing these letters, he gave me once a grudging permission with an all-redeeming grace.

"My dear Dilip," he wrote in January, 1934, "I received your affectionate letter and enclosure. As for revising or supplementing my previous letters for the second edition of your *Anami*—I will see. I make no promise. For your remarks about the success of my scrappy letters (the casual impromptus of an unknown man) leave me cold. Let them read the Gita, or, if they have a taste for these things in letter form, the "Friendly Epistle" of Nagarjuna, the letters of Plato, or even the Epistles of St. Paul which should afford sufficient variety. The semi-private-wholly-public letter is a form that does not suit me. It resembles too much those cinema-cameras in front of which you not only have to stand still and look dignified, but also to gesticulate and be animated, to walk and talk and be yourself with the devastating knowledge that the damned thing will appear, large as life, upon innumerable amateur screens until it, too, finally achieves the Nirvana of all created things. It is unfortunately true that my letters are inadequate. All the same they represent what I felt when I wrote them, and even if I



wrote more now they would still be inadequate. So why not leave it at that?

Yours affectionately,

KRISHNAPREM

Then as I had sent him a few of his letters printed in *Anami*, he wrote:

"Looking at my own letters in your *Anami*, I cannot help regretting that they have been preserved like flies in amber. In so many ways they now seem to me inadequate. Their only merit is that they were sincerely felt, but some points such as the relation of the abstract to the concrete have been bungled badly. This relation is far too subtle a thing to be dismissed in a few phrases and, though I had a meaning in my mind, I have thoroughly mishandled it. I find I have done little but reverse the ordinary commonplace identification of the 'spiritual' with the 'abstract'. Such an obvious, almost Shavian, reversal of values is far too coarse to be the truth and though it does all right for letters, it will not stand the strain of print. Enough, however, of ephemera never meant to stand the strain to which they have been subjected.

"The more one goes on in this path, the more one feels the limitations not only of speech but of thought. The mind is too heavy, too coarse. It will not respond, or responds but imperfectly, to the subtle vibrations that as it were come to it from above. The highest truth must needs be presented in symbols. Fichte, the German philosopher, said that if he had to live his life over again the first thing he would do

would be to invent a new set of symbols, but alas, it is not so easy. Symbols are born, not made. They descend from above and cannot be artificially manufactured. In this matter you, poets, have an advantage over philosophers like myself who try to use what is so ludicrously miscalled 'exact thought'. From below one can compile only allegories: real symbols are given from above. But when given one can learn far more from them than from words. The symbol (or image if you like) of the seated Buddha, for instance, taught me far more than I was able to learn from my assiduous study of the Buddhist texts. In fact, the mental concepts—miscalled knowledge—derived from the latter did much to obscure the real knowledge derived from the former and it was only as I learnt to pass behind the words and 'thoughts' that the true knowledge originally given by the 'symbol' was able to shine forth once more and to some extent irradiate even the dead conceptual knowledge.

"True learning is unlearning....

"I am glad to learn that Sri Aurobindo found my review of *The Riddle of This World* satisfactory. I tried as far as possible to give the reader an account of what he would find in the book and not merely to use it as a peg on which to hang my own virtuosity *à la* Macaulay. I think at least that it should serve to indicate to all who care for such things that here is a book not to be missed.

"You raise some interesting points in regard to 'expression' and 'silence', but at the same time, you seem to have slightly misunderstood me. I was urging that poetic expression can sometimes deal with realms in which philosophy

cannot breathe. To me, at least, it is a necessity which I can scarcely avoid. But I did want to emphasise that our philosophic dialectic, logic etcetera are far too coarse to deal with the higher levels of Reality. It is easy to cut things with the snip-snap of one's philosophical arguments, but too often we are merely cutting the air. Even the scientists are now finding that reality eludes them. And what is the significance of the square root of minus one which plays so essential a part in modern physics? To my mind it suggests most emphatically that there is a fundamental supra-rational element that enters in at the conversion or zero point between appearance and reality or, to be more exact, between appearance on this level and one level 'higher up'. I make this last qualification because I do not believe that the absolute Reality lies, as it were, next door to the world—except in a certain very ultimate sense, but there are many grades of 'reality' (or appearance) in between. To the intellect the square root of minus one has no meaning (at least none to my intellect) but certainly it must have a meaning or it would not be as useful as it is to modern physics.

"You speak of the 'silence' of the Buddha which you contrast with 'expression'. But if Buddha had not 'expressed', then we should not have five hundred million (or whatever it is) Buddhists living today. In truth he expressed a great deal and it was only on certain ultimate problems that he remained silent because they cannot be expressed in words—not at least in logical words. Symbolism is another matter. You say: 'Suppose Buddha were a formless



being under a formless tree in a formless Gaya; would we feel the same thrill at his silence?"

"Well, in reality, that is just what He *is* in one aspect. This is the meaning of the doctrine of the *Dharmakaya* and of the 'docetism' that marked so many *Mahayana* and also Christian Gnostic schools. But for most this Formless remains a mere matter of words and is, consequently, a falsity. Only experience can give us the truth. Without experience, the 'formless' is an empty abstraction, cold like all such, and shot through with the falsity and unreality that pervades all our purely intellectual concepts. We must use them but they only gain significance when life flows into them. In reality, they are neither cold nor abstract. It is our process of acquiring and using them that makes them so. We abstract by a process of negation and then wonder that the result is cold and negative. Our whole process stays on the purely intellectual level. When we say that Krishna is *nirakara* we have only said what He is *not*. But our positive statements are equally delusive. When we say that He is *anandamaya* we equally miss the reality because most men do not know what *ananda* is. They only know pleasure. They try to understand *ananda* in terms of pleasure and hence you get the materialising of the spiritual that marks so much of ordinary *Vaishnava* thought just as from the misuse of negation you get the *coldness* of so much *Vedantic* thought. The root of the trouble is just the mistaking of intellectual concepts for reality. When a man has *seen* something even of the Reality—call him Krishna or Buddha or Brahman—he then *knows* what is



meant. He knows how He is *nirakara* but not cold and how He is *anandamaya* but not mere *pleasure*. Till we get experience and knowledge we shall always be in unreality however lofty our conceptions may be. The Vedantin despises the Vaishnava for the latter's *concreteness* and the Vaishnava spits at the Vedantin saying it is all *cold*. One says 'I don't want' and the other says 'I want'. Damn all their 'wants' and 'don't wants'; they are quite irrelevant. These 'wants' and 'don't wants' do all the damage. It is not what *we want* that matters but what *He wills*, which is quite a different thing. All these concepts are so many suits of clothes. Unless we reach up to the Reality and fill them, they only serve for endless debate. What did the Rishi mean by saying He is *nirakara*? What did Buddha mean by *anatman*? What did the Vaishnavas mean by saying He is *nikhilarasamrita murti*?<sup>1</sup> The answer to this question must be sought in experience, not in mere dialectic. When the light of experience streams in and fills the empty concepts, then and then only does recognition flow in like a sea and we can *know* why the above words are used. *Ascharyavat pashyati kashchidenam* (as wonderful, some, few, see Him). Then we can know why the *atma* of the Upanishad means *the same thing* as the *anatma* of the Buddha and in a flash be free from the empty scholastic disputes that have filled the millennia. 'Oh but these are contradictions'—peevishly explains the intellect to which the only answer is: 'Very likely

<sup>1</sup> Literally, a form made up of the nectarous essence of universal delight.

they are, but you have dam' well got to put up with them!'

"I don't mean at all to urge the contempt for the intellect which most Christians and some Vaishnavas have taught, but I do mean to say that the intellect is in itself a sort of formative or shaping machine. It can only work if it is supplied with material to shape and that material must come either from the sense-world below or from the spiritual world above.

"In the meanwhile it seems to me as foolish to lose one's emotion in the coldness of abstract negation as to fuddle one's mind in the warmth of a (fundamentally) sensuous *Goloka*.

"These thoughts were suggested to me by the contrast you drew between the emotional singing of Chaitanya Deva and the silent meditation of the Buddha. Needless to say that the remarks in the paragraphs immediately above this do not apply to these great Teachers but only to some of their followers.

"You speak of a certain 'shakiness at the idea of being immersed in a Timeless mute *Akshara Brahman*'; but surely that is only because of our ignorance of what is meant by that experience and of a consequent misconception in terms of worldly experiences. That is where so many Vaishnavas as well as Vedantins go wrong. They quarrel furiously about words, about the expression, instead of bending their whole energy on an attempt to *realise* what is meant by the expression. In the words of an old Buddhist writer, 'that is called confusing the moon with the finger that points to it.'

"Books are after all just words, but these words fall into two categories. Words used to express worldly experience and words used to express transcendental experience. (Perhaps there is also an intermediate class which are just words!) When there is any reason to suppose that words are being used to express transcendental experience, it becomes of the utmost importance how we try to read them. The wrong way is to fasten on the words themselves and find fault with them because they are not the same words as we find in some other book. The right way is to try with all one's might to find out what the words mean: to find out why those particular words were chosen by the writer to express his vision and just in proportion as we succeed in this attempt, we shall gain a new insight into Him 'from whom words together with the mind fall back baffled.'

"So you see that in my previous letter I was not deprecating *expression* but only lamenting the inadequacy of it. In the last resort, this whole cosmos is but expression—Divine Expression, and in proportion as He, the *kaviḥ purāṇah*, is able to manifest in us, we shall ourselves automatically become centres of expression. Till then, our productions whether in the realm of poetry, philosophy or art, are but the play of children, funerals where none is dead and marriage where there is no bride.

"Talking of poetry brings me to the poem you sent me (Transformation of Consciousness). I like it very much and think it is perhaps the best of all those that you have translated."

On this Gurudev commented:



“Dilip,

Krishnaprem's letters, as usual, are interesting and admirable in substance and expression and, in addition, there is an immense increase in comprehensiveness and wideness. The point about the intellect's misrepresentation of the Formless (the result of a merely negative expression of something that is inexpressibly intimate and positive) is very well made and hits the truth in the centre. No one who has had the *ananda* of the Brahman can do anything but smile at the charge of coldness; there is an absoluteness of immutable ecstasy in it, a concentrated intensity of silent and inalienable rapture that is impossible even to suggest to anyone who has not had the experience. The eternal Reality is neither cold nor dry nor empty; you might as well talk of the midsummer sunlight as cold or the ocean as dry or perfect fullness as empty. Even when you enter into it by elimination of form and everything else, it surges as a miraculous fullness—that is truly the *Purnam*—when it is entered affirmatively as well as by negation, there can obviously be no question of emptiness or dryness! All is there and more than one could ever dream of as the All. That is why one has to object to the intellectual thrusting itself in as the *subjanta* (all-knowing) judge; if it kept to its own limits, there would be no objection to it. But it makes constructions of words and ideas which have no application to the Truth, babbles foolish things in its ignorance and makes its constructions a wall which refuse to let in the Truth and surpasses its own capacities and scope.”

And Krishnaprem went on evolving—gaining not only



in "comprehensiveness and wideness" but also in human sympathy which endeared him to all who came in contact with him. I would gladly give many instances of this power of his to enter at once into other peoples points of view. But as I have to put it briefly, I will end with one more letter which he wrote in reply to some questions I put to him in 1934. I wrote in my letter, among other things, that though he followed a path different from ours, I believed that the more we moved on in our quest for the spirit, the less our paths diverged, that is, beyond a certain level. To that he sent a long reply which speaks for itself.

"You are quite right", he wrote. "*Beyond a certain level* the experiences along different paths are the same. In the first place, this is a bare fact as you can find by a study of genuine mystical experience all the world over. It is the mental interpretations which cause the apparent differences. Secondly, it is so because there is in reality only one path (above a certain level again) though the terminology, which really belongs to a lower level, may easily vary. There are two eternal paths: the path of Light and the path of Darkness, as the Gita says. One and only one is the 'path of Light' but the descriptions may vary infinitely. The Grand Trunk Road is one only, though one may go along it on a push bike or a motor bike. The difference in speed may inspire a different description, but the road is the same and even then the extra horse-power of which the motor cyclist is so proud is based on the same plodding man-power in the end and in this too he will have to face God's inexorable 'stand and deliver', and give an account of how he used

the extra horse-power which he, perhaps, took for granted.

"Your ideas about doubts however strike me as rather confused. Doubt is quite proper and inevitable on the intellectual plane. Poking your finger in (or its 'scientific' equivalent) is a perfectly proper means of physical investigation and has to be used, but it is quite out of place in dealing with intellectual problems. Similarly doubt is a most useful intellectual tool but it is quite inapplicable to *spiritual* problems. Do not confuse spiritual truth with the intellectual expression of it. The latter may and often should be doubted, because by that we come to a more adequate expression. You ask how I 'dismiss' my doubts. I don't. I solve them as far as possible and only dismiss them when I see that the solution is not available at the present moment or with my present *range*. But I don't let them trespass where they have no right, namely, in the spiritual realm. There they are sheer irrelevancies. I don't doubt my bottom: I am sitting on it. This isn't a mere vulgar metaphor but sheer fact. The spiritual reality is that which is the very *support* of all other activities, without it they couldn't be. 'I say unto thee that thou art Peter and upon this rock I will found my Church.' Just try and find out what that 'rock' really is. Many people confuse beautiful poetry or profound philosophy with spiritual fact. But these are but the garments which can, and often should be, changed. None last, for I am prepared to change my intellectual formulations ten times in a day, provided I find each time better ones. So don't go about setting me up as an apostle of *blind faith*, because I am *not*. Now, as always, I hold to the

phrase of the Buddha 'Atma-dipa atma sharanam', the light of truth is within us and it is no good looking for it elsewhere. No teacher can do more than just push you over the edge *if you are standing on it*. You can retain your private judgment as long as you like provided you only apply it within the sphere to which it is applicable. You can't keep gold fish in a bird cage.

"If you haven't the light you want but believe that others have it, stick to *them* for all you are worth till you get it. If you have light yourself but your mind gets in the way, then treat it as you would your motor: clean it, overhaul it, rebuild the dam' thing but don't cut your own throat because your car doesn't run properly.

"But you won't get rid of doubts by *dismissing* them. They will work all the more underneath. You must solve them or, at least, see why a solution is impossible at present and patiently wait. Yes, I am convinced of the gospel of faith but not of faith in some intellectual phrase or other which may be adequate or may not. Not of faith in any external thing (and even the intellect is external, a little less so than the body, that is all) but faith in the reality that I call Krishna, whom you can call by any name you please. Faith, however, does not mean turning your back on the intellect. Use your intellect for all it is worth *in its own field*. At any rate I use mine. From the point of view of the lower personality faith means the subordination of the lower to the higher. In actual fact *faith is the light which the higher sends down to the lower* (as far as that lower will let it!). In any case it doesn't mean 'believe all that you are



told.' I refer you to my previous letter to see what should be done with regard to words (written or spoken) which you have reason to think enshrine spiritual experience. I am sure you are not asked to aspire to an *undiscerning faith*. Few things are more stupid. What one is asked for is to have faith in one's Guru and in one's own discernment when it is encouraged by the Guru. It would be best, if one could, to cling to the memory of this discernment even when the *tamasic* tide flows in and temporarily covers up the landmarks.

"You talk of humility, but I don't know whether humility is the truest test of spirituality or not. All spiritual men I know are profoundly humble because they know their true position. But humility does not consist in the damnable deprecatory rubbing of the hands that is so fashionable among some Vaishnavas. That is only an inverted conceit. True humility is an absence of egoism. It comes from realising that one is an entirely insignificant phenomenon in the cosmos; even if his capacities and messages shake the stars in their courses he is a *transient* phenomenon. He had a beginning and he will have an end. He is, essentially, a horse for someone else to ride, that is his own importance. But if a horse spends his whole time bucking up his heels in the jungle and won't bear the saddle, then his owner 'disposes him off' as the students say.

" 'But I am an immortal soul, I beg your pardon!' Did the horse say he was? If he has identified himself with his rider then his asseveration is true, but otherwise I fear the sleekest of horses is nothing but a mass of carrion sewn up



in a flimsy skin bag! And not only his body but also his unconquerable horsey mind with all its doubts and private neighings.

"If one realises this fact, real humility follows as a matter of course, but if one doesn't, then all the 'miserable sinners', *naradham* and all that kind of rot had better be dropped down the water-closet where they belong. 'Miserable sinners' can canter to Hell and probably will anyway! As for the sceptics, if I were your Guru I would have told you long ago to 'dispose them off' in the manner suggested above. Damn their noble scepticism and sceptical nobility and all that kind of stuff:

Yada charmavadakasham veshtaishyanti manavah  
Tada devam avijnaya dukhasyanto bhavishyati<sup>1</sup>

The sceptics don't know that Deva, so let them just shut up. No doubt they are this and that and the other thing, but one day they will themselves know that all this and that and the other things are only to be offered at the feet of their Deva. No, I am not being intolerant, but there is such a thing as moderation in all things or at least there should be.

"As an instance in illustration of my previous remarks I may say that I am distinctly occupied (though not *sorely*

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo translated this at my request: "This means that when men shall be able to fold the sky round them like a skin, then it will be possible to put an end to grief without knowing the Divine. It simply means that the two things are equally impossible." (This quotation is from the Svetashvatara Upanishad).

*troubled* as the phrase goes) with doubts whether there is a personal God. (So you see your sceptical friends needn't be so proud of their doubts). Don't get alarmed either. The doubts refer to the meaning and adequacy of the terms employed and have reference to such questions as whether it is permissible to put new wine in old bottles, to call old things by new names, to disregard associations etc. If I say I believe in a personal God, a lot of fools will suppose I mean someone like the Lord God Jehovah on His throne, and if I say I don't believe, others will suppose that I believe in abstraction—a sort of 'Space, Time and Deity' kind of thing. This is merely by way of illustration of the function of doubt. I keep a whole collection of doubts; grow them in fact like mustard and cress and when they are ripe I eat them up...

"Many thanks for sending me Sri Aurobindo's unpublished poem in Alexandrines: 'I walked beside the waters in a world of light.' I loved it, particularly where he describes the vision of the Cosmic Ignorance:

'....But there came

A dire intrusion wrapped in married cloud and flame,  
Across the blue-white moon-hush of my magic seas  
A sudden sweeping of immense peripheries  
Of darkness ringing lambent lustres shadowy-vast,  
A nameless dread, a Power incalculable passed  
Whose feet were death, whose wings were immortality.  
Its changing mind was time, its heart eternity.  
All opposites were there, unreconciled, uneased,

Struggling for victory, by victory unappeased.  
All things it bore, even that which brings undying peace,  
But secret, veiled, waiting for some supreme release.  
I saw the spirit of the Cosmic Ignorance;  
I felt its power besiege my gloried fields of trance'."

I sent up the letter to Gurudev, giving him an account of how I was hard-pressed by doubts and misgivings. He commented as follows:

"Dilip,

I agree with most of what Krishnaprem says, though one or two things I would put from a different angle. Your reasonings about faith and doubt have been of a rather extravagant angle because they come to this that one must either doubt everything or believe everything, however absurd, that anybody says. I have repeatedly told you that there is not only *room* for discrimination in Yoga, but a *need* for it at every step—otherwise you will get lost in the jungle of things that are not spiritual—as for instance the tangle of what I call 'the intermediate zones.' I have also told you that you are not asked to believe everything told by anybody and that there is no call to put faith in all the miraculous things narrated about Bijoykrishna or another. That, I have said, is a question not of faith but of mental belief—and faith is not a mental belief in outward facts but an intuition of the inner being about spiritual things. Krishnaprem means the same thing when he says that faith is the light sent down by the higher to the lower



personality. As for the epithet 'blind' used by Ramakrishna, it means, as I said, not ignorantly credulous, but untroubled by the questionings of the intellect and unshaken by outward appearances of fact; e.g. one has faith in the Divine even though the fact seems to be that the world here or at least the human world is driven by undivine forces. One has faith in the Guru even when he uses methods that your intellect cannot grasp or affirms things as true of which you have as yet no experiences (for if his knowledge and experience are not greater than yours, why did you choose him as a Guru?). One has faith in the Path leading to the Goal even when the Goal is very far off and the way covered by mist and cloud and smitten repeatedly by the thunderbolt and so on. Even in worldly things man can do nothing great if he has not faith—in the spiritual realm it is still more indispensable. But this faith depends not on ignorant credulity, but on a light that burns inside though not seen by the eyes of the outward mind, a knowledge within that has not yet taken the form of outer knowledge.

"One thing however: I make a distinction between doubt and discrimination. If doubt meant discernment, questioning as to what might be the truth of this or that matter, it would be a part of discrimination and quite admissible; but what is usually meant by doubt is a negation positive and peremptory which does not stop to investigate, to consider in the light, to try, to enquire, but says at once: 'Oh, no I am never going to take that as possibly true'. That kind of doubt may be very useful in ordinary life, it may be



practically useful in battering down established things or established ideas or certain kinds of external controversy to undermine a position that is too dogmatically positive; but I do not think it is of any positive use in matters even of intellectual enquiry. There is nothing it can do there that impartial discrimination cannot do much better. In spiritual matters discrimination has a huge place, but negating doubt simply stops the path to Truth with its placard 'No entry', or its dogmatic 'Thus far and no farther.'

"As for the intellect it is indispensable to man up to a certain point; after that it becomes an inferior instrument and often misleading and obstructive. It is what I meant when I wrote: 'Reason was the helper, reason is the bar'. Intellect has done many things for man; it has helped to raise him high above the animals; at its best it has opened a first view on all great fields of knowledge. But it cannot go beyond that; it cannot get at Truth itself, only at some reflections, forms, representations of it. I myself cannot remember to have ever arrived at anything in the spiritual field by the power of the intellect; I have used it only to help the expression of what I have known and experienced, but even there it is only certain forms that it provided, they were used by another Light and a larger Mind than the intellect. When the intellect tried to decide things in this field, it always delayed matters. I suppose what it can do sometimes is to stir up the mind, plough it or prepare—but the knowledge comes only when one gets another, higher than the intellectual, opening. Even in mind itself there are things higher than the intellect, ranges of activity that exceed it.

Spiritual knowledge is easier to these than to the reasoning intelligence."

I enclosed a copy of Gurudev's letter in my reply to Krishnaprem and wrote:

"I am very grateful, Krishnaprem, for all that you have written to me which has been so very helpful. It is so like you, and I am glad that Gurudev has once more commented so favourably on your views. But one thing: the other day M. wrote to me that you had asserted to him that true faith *could never precede* personal experience and so much of what is extolled as faith was pure dogma or something to that effect. Did you tell him all this?"

To which he replied:

"Now what is this 'faith and experience' business? I can't remember any remarks on that subject to M. In fact the only thing I ever remember saying on the subject of faith was contained in a letter to you in which, as far as I remember, I said that faith was the light of the higher Self penetrating the lower or some words to that effect.

"Casting about in my memory I do seem to recollect some vague talk with M. but the remarks were no doubt *ad hoc* and probably were directed against the *orthodox* religious demand for a blind acceptance of dogmatic belief. Such belief or pseudo-belief (for it seldom, if ever, is real belief) has nothing to do with what I meant by faith in writing to you. This is not an intellectual assent to intellectualised propositions for which one has insufficient evidence, but an attitude of the soul which is based on a dim perception in the personality of something more clearly known on

higher levels. That, at any rate, is what I meant by 'true faith' and I should have thought that your Gurudev would more or less agree with it. But at any rate that is my position at present; I fancy that either you or M. must have garbled what I said.

"Certainly *experiences* are not the Goal but *experience* (in a way, at least) is, for by *experience* I mean living knowledge manifesting in one's being, and if that is not present, something is wrong or at least something has not started yet.

"Of course faith precedes experience *on this level* but it does so only because it is itself the Light from experience already present higher up.

"Do you *know* what is immortal or what is mortal? and do you *know* which of these you are?

"Answer these questions and you will understand what I mean by faith. Incidentally, you will also know what I mean by *bhakti*, the *ahuti*—offering—of the mortal in the flame of the immortal. I say again:

'I said it loud—I said it clear:

I went and shouted in his ear.'

"I am not in any way against emotion. That would be quite absurd. But I do criticise the current practice of weltering in emotion *for its own sake* and for the sake of the pleasure attaching to it. That is like a man weltering in a hot bath.

"Know Krishna, love Krishna and work for Krishna. Then you can leave all the blisses to take care of themselves. You will certainly not find any shortage of them. Of course



there is bliss experienced in self-offering but do not offer yourself *in order to get the bliss* but offer yourself because He is Krishna and your being can only fulfil itself by being united to His Being.

“About *bhakti*—the word is ambiguously used. Some people mean by it an emotional rapture *as such*. (Don’t ignore these two small words). In that case *bhakti* is not the highest thing. Others, including myself, mean by it self-giving to Krishna which is *of course* accompanied by emotional rapture but it is not performed *for the sake of* the rapture. In that case it is the *highest* or something like it at least, for I do not like to dogmatise about high, higher, highest. Loud applause from you at this point I suppose? But be sure you don’t misunderstand me. Before you can offer the oblation into the fire you have to know where the fire is and Krishna is *in the light, in the light, in the light!*

“Of course I have left out all sorts of qualifications. There is such a thing as preliminary offering, or say, wish to offer, and much more, but I am writing a letter, not a book.

“Disregard the Light at your peril for He is in the Light and *a light must mingle with Light*. Fail to know the Light and you will helplessly tread the dark path of the *dakshinayana*, whirling helplessly, the sport but not the master of Karma.

“Everybody should strive to find out so that at death he may echo the cry of the Orphic initiate: ‘From the Pure I go to the Pure’. All I can say is that the Light in which



Krishna dwells is *a light which sees*, not a light which is seen and the voice of Krishna is a voice which speaks, not a voice which is heard.

"The point about concrete representation, images, myths, etc. is simply that symbols which are known as symbols are sometimes less dangerous than symbols which are not recognised as such and it is impossible, however 'abstract' and *Vedanti* one may be, to escape from symbols as all words are symbols."

This I sent up to Gurudev and wrote in my covering letter:

"I explained to Krishnaprem how M. had misunderstood him and incidentally wanted to have a fling at 'the faithful' as he called them. Please tell me, Guru, whether he uses the phrase 'Krishna's Light' to imply Knowledge. Please also note what he writes in the second paragraph about his own view of true faith and ventures: 'I should have thought your Gurudev would more or less agree with it.'"

To this Gurudev wrote back: "I do, not only *more or less* but entirely". Then he went on to add: "I will write about Krishnaprem tomorrow, God willing. Not much to say though—when one heartily agrees what can one say except 'hurrah' or 'ditto'?"

He did keep his promise. For the next day I received the following:

"I do not know that I can answer your question about what Krishnaprem means by Krishna's Light. It is certainly not what is ordinarily meant by knowledge. He may

mean the Light of the Divine consciousness, or the light that comes from it or he may mean the luminous being of Krishna in which all things are in their supreme truth: the truth of knowledge, the truth of *bhakti*, the truth of ecstasy and *ananda*, everything is there.

“There is also a manifestation of Light—the Upanishads speak of *Jyotibrahma*, the Light that is Brahman. Very often the *sadhaka* feels a flow of light upon him and around him or a flow of light invading his centres or even his whole being and body, penetrating and illumining every cell and in that light there grows the spiritual consciousness and one becomes open to all or many of its workings and realisations. Appositely, I have a review of the book of Ramdas entitled ‘Vision’ before me in which he describes such an experience, got by the repetition of Rama mantra, but, if I understood rightly, after a long and rigorous self-discipline: ‘The mantra having stopped automatically, he beheld a small circular light before his mental vision. This yielded him thrills of delight. This experience continued for some days, he felt a dazzling light like lightning flashing before his eyes, which ultimately permeated and absorbed him. Now an inexpressible transport of bliss filled every pore of his physical frame’. It does not always come like that—very often it comes like stages or at long intervals, at first, working on the consciousness till it is ready.

‘We speak here also of Krishna’s light—Krishna’s light in the mind, Krishna’s light in the vital etc. But it is a special light—in the mind it brings clarity, freedom from obscurity, mental error and perversion; in the vital it clears

all perilous stuff and where it is there is a pure and divine happiness and gladness.

"But why limit oneself, insist on one thing alone and shut out every other? Whether it be by *bhakti* or by Light or by *ananda* or by peace or by another means whatsoever that one gets the initial realisation of the Divine, to get it is the thing and all means are good that bring it. If it is *bhakti* that one insists on, it is by the *bhakti* that *bhakti* comes and *bhakti* in its fulness is nothing but an entire self-giving as Krishnaprem very rightly indicates. But then all meditation, all *tapasya*, all means of prayer or *mantra* must have that as its end and it is when one has progressed sufficiently in that that the Divine Grace descends and the realisation comes and develops till it is complete. But the moment of its advent is chosen by the wisdom of the Divine alone and one must have the strength to go on till it arrives, for when all is truly ready it cannot fail to come."

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It was often like this that it happened: sometimes he or a *gurubhai* would write something to me whereupon Sri Aurobindo would comment. I would then convey to Krishnaprem how things stood, and then he, as often as not, came forward with his reactions to the message of Gurudev, upon which Gurudev would have something more to say by way of clarification, almost like a billiard ball bounding and rebounding again and again. Here I may as well give a typical example of the far-reaching repercussions.



As days passed, I discovered a curious trend in my own nature: whenever anybody tried to denigrate faith, my faith rose up resolutely to vindicate what I called sacrosanct; but the moment somebody declaimed too loudly that faith was the only passport to truth and reason was an outcaste in the Holy of Holies, I would take up the challenge and defend reason with all sorts of reasonings. So it happened that once a gurubhai—whom I will call Staunch, to indicate one of the faithful brood—invaded my sanctum and said ecstatically that his faith had lately become all but unshakable that the atom bomb was a godsend and must chasten men into solid sanity. To that I demurred and wrote to our Arbitrator in despair:

“Gurudev,

I admire Staunch's tender heart though I wish his brains had been a trifle less soft. Of course the atom bomb *may*, as he asserts, scare people into sanity, but how, in the name of sanity, is one to be sure of such a consummation devoutly to be wished? Staunch argues that his faith is built on a rock but does not explain on what plinth this rock is built. But joking apart, Guru, tell me if you have a soft corner in your heart for such a touching faith, since I can give it no other epithet than infantine. And if he feels that our present civilisation is going to be saved thus because his optimistic faith tells him so, then I must retort that my pessimistic reason tells me, with equal conviction, that civilisation which needs such puerile faith and optimism to be saved is hardly worth saving. Now what is *your* reaction, please?”

To that Gurudev wrote back:



"I do not feel armed to cut the Gordian Knot with a sentence and need not accept Staunch's or anybody else's proposition or solution. Man needs both faith and reason so long as he has not reached a surer insight and greater knowledge. Without faith he cannot certainly walk on any road, and without reason he might very well be walking, even with the staff of faith to support him, in the darkness. Staunch himself founds his faith if not on reason yet on reasons; and the rationalist, the rationaliser or the reasoner must have some faith even if it be faith only in reason itself as sufficient and authoritative, just as the believer has faith in his faith as sufficient and authoritative. Yet both are capable of error as they must be, since both are instruments of the human mind whose nature is to err, and they share that mind's limitations. Each must walk by the light he has, even though there are dark spots in which he stumbles.

"All that is, however, another matter than the question about the present civilisation. It is not this which has to be saved; it is the world that has to be saved and that will surely be done, though it may not be so easily or so soon as some wish or imagine, or in the way that they imagine. The present must surely change, but whether by a destruction or a new construction on the basis of a greater Truth, is the issue. The Mother has left the question hanging and I can only do the same. After all, the wise man, unless he is a prophet or a Director of the Madras Astrological Bureau, must often be content to take the Asquithian position. Neither optimism nor pessimism is the truth: they are only modes of the mind or modes of the temperament.

Let us then, without either excessive optimism or excessive pessimism, *wait and see*."

I sent this to Krishnaprem who wrote back from Almora:

"About 'faith and optimism'—well, you know who it is that rushes in where angels fear to tread. But still one fool may, I suppose, open his heart to another. Why do you worry over what you can't accept in your friend Staunch's robust faith? As I see it, it is not his faith which is the difficulty but the particular mental concepts in which he expressed it. True faith is naked. It is not belief in this or that: it has little, if anything, to do with 'this or that'. It is a naked smokeless flame that burns in the secret recesses of the heart, weaving the soul and lightening it on its path. The true content of the Flame we cannot formulate in the mind and so we cover it with a painted lampshade and say we believe in this or that, the figures which our minds have painted on the shade. And that does not matter provided we really don't believe that the painted figures are the content of our Faith. They are symbols of it, for even the mind cannot draw a single line arbitrarily but they share in the mind's error and inadequacy.

"It is this that causes the rationalist to curse so. He is always active demolishing the painted figures of men's faith and then is astonished to find the faith still there clothed in new figures: '*Nainam chhindanti shastrani*.'

"I have looked in when the weather was darkest and this is what I saw:

"I saw the deep undertone of thwarted desire running

fiercely in the psychic sea. I saw it rise to the surface in great waves and the ship of the mind, with cables cut, running before the dark wind. I saw the crew, their fears transformed into panic anger by the contact of the angry waves, seizing axes and hacking away at cordage and masts. I saw them aim their blows at the wonderful compass glowing with light in the centre of the ship but though they destroyed the card they could not touch the luminous needle. Finally they grew berserk and slashed away at the very timbers of the ship and when it sank they floundered in the water cursing and sobbing. And still the compass shone, a needle of flame poised serenely in the dark void above the waters. And when they saw that, they swam towards it and laid hold of it and then I saw that there around them was the ship once more, with all its masts and timbers intact and the dark storm had receded again far beneath the surface of a summer sea. But shame was in the hearts of the crew.

"We should not be worried by the optimist pessimist-business. Optimism is the disposition to think that our wishes will be realised and pessimism the disposition to think that most probably they will not. Neither of them is at all relevant. Not our wishes but Krishna's will is what matters—and that *will* be realised, make no mistake about that. How and when is known to Him—not to us.

"This *famous* civilisation of ours and all its treasures of art and literature and science may vanish as did that of Atlantis and yet nothing will have gone, for He is there and all is in Him. As Christ said to the Jews, proud of their



descent from Abraham: 'I tell you, God is able to raise up from these stones seed unto Abraham.'

Pralaya-payodhi-jale dhritavānāsi vedam  
Vihita-vahitra-charitamakhedam  
Keshavadhrita-mīna sharira  
Jaya Jagadisha Hare."

This, duly sent up to Gurudev, elicited the following comment:

"As for faith, Krishnaprem's meaning is clear enough. Faith in the spiritual sense is not a mental belief which can waver and change. It can wear that form in the mind, but that belief is not the faith itself, it is only the external form. Just as the body, the external form, can change but the spirit remains the same, so it is here. Faith is a certitude in the soul which does not depend on reasoning, on this or that mental idea, on circumstances, on this and that passing condition of the mind or the vital or the body. It may be hidden, eclipsed, may even seem quenched, but it appears again after the storm or the eclipse; it is seen burning still in the soul when one has thought that it was extinguished for ever. The mind may be a shifting sea of doubts and yet that faith may be there within and, if so, it will keep even the doubt-racked mind in the way so that it goes on in spite of itself towards its destined goal. Faith is a spiritual certitude of the spiritual, the divine, the soul's ideal, something that clings to that even when it is not fulfilled in life, even when the immediate facts or the persistent circumstances



seem to deny it. This is a common experience in the life of the human being; if it were not so, man would be a plaything of a changing mind or a sport of circumstances. I have, I think, more than once, written the same thing as Krishnaprem though in a different language.

“If you understand this and keep it in mind, Krishnaprem’s experience and the image in which he saw it should be sufficiently clear. The needle is this power in the soul and the card with its directions the guiding indications given by it to the mind and life. The ship is the psychological structure of ideas, beliefs, spiritual and psychic experiences, the whole building of the inner life in which one moves onward in the voyage towards the goal. When the storm comes, a storm of doubts, failures, disappointments, adverse circumstances and what not, the crew—let us say, the powers of the mind and vital and the physical consciousness—begin to disbelieve, despond, stand aghast at the contradiction between our hopes and beliefs and the present facts and they even turn in their rage of disbelief and despair to deny and destroy the structure of their inner thought and life which was bearing them on, tear up even the compass which was their help and guide, even to reject the needle, the great constant in their spirit. But when they have come to the point of drowning, that power acts on them, they turn to it instinctively for refuge and then suddenly they find all cleared, all the destruction was their own illusory action and the ship reappears as strong as before. This is an experience which most seekers have had many times, especially in the earlier or middle course of their *sadhana*. All that has

been done seems to be undone, then suddenly or slowly the storm passes, the constant needle reappears; it may even be that the ship which was a small sloop or at most a schooner or a frigate becomes an armed cruiser and finally a great battleship unsinkable and indestructible. That is a parable but its meaning should be quite intelligible, and it is a pragmatic fact of spiritual experience. I may add that this inmost faith or fixed needle of spiritual aspiration may be there without one's clearly knowing it; one may think that one has only beliefs, propensities, a yearning in the heart or a vital preference which seem to be temporarily destroyed or suspended, yet the hidden constant remains, resumes its action, keeps us on a way and carries us through. It can be said of it in the words of the Gita that even a little of this delivers us from great danger, carries us to the other side of all difficulties, *sarva durgani*."

In 1946, in East Bengal, thousands of Hindus were massacred, their women raped, houses burnt and girls abducted. I felt greatly depressed, the more as many of my friends kept on writing to me about the urgent need of relief-work for the bereaved Hindus. "Why not let me join the relief-workers, Guru?" I wrote to him after giving him a long account of the fallow land of my heart: "I will have little to lose as I feel I have not been getting on famously in your Yoga for some time past and so am often reminded, now-a-days, of Tagore's remark in 1938: 'You and I are artists, Dilip, not Yogis by temperament'. So will you permit me to go?"—and so on.

To that Gurudev wrote back:

"After receiving your account of your present condition which I understand perfectly well, my advice remains the same: to stick on persistently till the dawn comes—it surely will if you resist the temptation to run away into some outer darkness which it would have much difficulty in reaching. The details you give do not at all convince me that Tagore was right in thinking that your *sadhana* was not at all in line with my Yoga or that you are right in concluding that you are not meant for this line. On the contrary, these are things which come almost inevitably in one degree or another at a certain critical stage through which almost everyone has to pass and which usually lasts for an uncomfortably long time but which need not be at all conclusive or definitive. Usually if one persists, it is the period of darkest night before the dawn which comes to almost every spiritual aspirant. It is due to a plunge one has to take into sheer physical consciousness unsupported by any true mental light or by any vital joy in life, for these usually withdraw behind the veil, though they are not, as they seem to be, permanently lost. It is a period when doubt, denial, dryness, greyness and all kindred things come up with great force and often reign completely for a time. It is after this stage has been successfully crossed that the true light begins to come, the light which is not of the mind but of the spirit. The spiritual light no doubt comes to a certain extent and to a few to a considerable extent in the earlier stages, though that is not the case with all—for some have to wait till they can clear out the obstructing stuff in the mind, vital and physical consciousness, and until then they



get only a touch now and then. But even at the best, this earlier spiritual light is never complete, until the darkness of the physical consciousness has been faced and overcome. It is not by one's own fault that one falls into this state; it can come when one is trying one's best to advance. It does not really indicate any radical disability in the nature but certainly it is a hard ordeal and one has to stick very firmly to pass through it. It is difficult to explain these things because the psychological necessity is difficult for the ordinary human reason to understand or to accept. I will try to have a shot at it, but it may take some days. Meanwhile, as you have asked what is my advice, I send you this brief answer."

This I sent to Krishnaprem who wrote to me:

"I am so sorry that you are not well and still more so to see the nature of the troubles you refer to. Set your teeth and stick it out as best you can: the darkness will pass if you keep facing it. Remember what I wrote to you about the ship and the compass. Never mind what happens: keep your mind on Sri Krishna's feet, remember always that you belong to Him and not to yourself and just go on whether in light or in darkness, in joy or in sorrow as *He* wills. But stick to it. Since your Gurudev sanctions, take a holiday, go to Raman Asram or Ramdas or anywhere else but do not for one moment entertain the thought of ever going back to your old life: that is gone for ever and thoughts of it can only bring trouble. These things come sometime or other—sometimes again and again to most, in fact I suppose to all *sadhakas*. The form may vary but the cause is the



same: the opposition of the powers which rule our lower natures to the upward surging movement of the spirit. Naturally, it is only when that upward movement becomes real or promises to become real that those powers feel their dominion threatened or respond with storms and darkness in some form or other. Moreover they are only able to do it by working on some weakness in us, some inner resentment or despondency at thwarted desires. As the magician needs something belonging to his would-be victim, some lock of hair or fragment of clothing, before he can work his magic—so these powers need some weakness in ourselves before they can work their maya. Hold them at bay by contemplating on Sri Krishna's feet whenever such thoughts arise. Refuse them the more as *your* thoughts; realise that they come from outside and let the Light that shines from His feet dispel and drive them away. Then try to find what it is in you that they made use of as a focus to act upon—nearly always it is some thwarted desire of the ego, often quite unacknowledged by the surface mind.

"Anyway, by whatever means, stick it out, don't even think of turning back. The moment you have done it, that moment those powers, having gained their end, would leave their maya and you would be bitterly repenting.

"There can be no going back for us, Dilip: that which we have left behind us has perished and it is a sheer illusion to think that we can recover it. It has gone and whether we like it or no, in sorrow or in joy, we must push on. Don't try to look back even: it only makes us giddy and what we see are only deceitful phantoms.

"Rather we should look to the future with its promise of something quite different from what now is. Now at this moment we should seize the eternal feet of Krishna, not hope to seize them at some future date—'if we are good' as they used to say when we were children. *Now, now, now!* Let the past go and the future take care of itself.

"It is natural that you should be painfully affected by the horrors of Bengal but that too is in Krishna's hands. He who has given himself to Krishna must keep his eyes on His feet, irrevocably, though the triple world fell into ruin."

Upon this Gurudev finally commented:

"Krishnaprem's letter is admirable from start to finish and every sentence hits the truth with great point and force. He has evidently an accurate knowledge both of the psychological and the occult forces that act in Yoga; all that he says is in agreement with my own experience and I concur. His account of the rationale of your present difficulties is quite correct and no other explanation is needed—except what I was writing in my unfinished letter about the descent of the *sadhana* into the plane of the physical consciousness and that does not disaccord with but only completes what he says. He is quite right in saying that the heaviness of these attacks was due to the fact that you had taken up the *sadhana* in earnest and were approaching, as one might say, the gates of the Kingdom of Light. That always makes these forces rage and they strain every nerve and use or create every opportunity to turn the *sadhaka* back or, if possible, drive him out of the path altogether by their suggestion, their violent influences and their exploitation

of all kinds of incidents that always crop up more and more when these conditions prevail, so that he may not reach the gates. I have written to you more than once alluding to these forces, but I did not press the point because I saw that like most people whose minds are rationalised by the modern European education you were not inclined to believe in or at least to attach any importance to this knowledge. People, now-a-days, seek the explanation for everything in their ignorant reason, their surface experience and in outside happenings. They do not see the hidden forces and inner causes which were well-known and visualised in the traditional Indian and Yogic knowledge. Of course, these forces find their *point d'appui* in the *sadhaka* himself, in the ignorant parts of his consciousness and its assent to their suggestions and influences; otherwise they could not act or at least could not act with any success. In your case the chief *points d'appui* have been the extreme sensitiveness of the lower vital ego and now also the physical consciousness with all its fixed or standing opinions, prejudices, prejudgments, habitual reactions, personal preferences, clinging to old ideas and associations, its obstinate doubts and its maintaining these things as a wall of obstruction and opposition to the larger light. This activity of the physical mind is what people call intellect and reason although it is only the turning of a machine in a circle of mental habits and is very different from the true and free reason, the higher *buddhi*, which is capable of enlightenment and still more from the higher spiritual light or that insight and tact of the psychic consciousness which sees at once what is true



and right and distinguishes it from what is wrong and false. This insight you had very constantly whenever you were in a good condition and especially whenever *bhakti* became strong in you. When the *sadhaka* comes down into the physical consciousness leaving the mental and higher vital ranges on which he had first turned towards the Divine, these opposite things become very strong and sticky and, as one's more helpful states and experiences draw back behind the veil and one can hardly realise that one ever had them, it becomes difficult to get out of this condition. The only thing then, as Krishnaprem has told you and I also have insisted, is to stick it out. If once one can get and keep the resolution to refuse to accept the suggestions of these forces, however plausible they may seem, then either quickly or gradually this condition can diminish and will be overpassed and cease. To give up Yoga is no solution; you could not successfully do it as both Krishnaprem and I have told you and as your own mind tells you when it is clear. A temporary absence from the Ashram for relief from the struggle is a different matter. I do not think, however, that residence in the Raman Ashram would be eventually helpful except for bringing back some peace of mind; Raman Maharshi is a great Yogi and his realisation very high on its own line; but it does not seem to me that it is a line which you could successfully follow as you certainly can follow the path of *bhakti* if you stick to it, and there might then be the danger of your falling between two stools, losing your own path and not being able to follow the path of another nature.



"As regards Bengal, things are certainly very bad; the condition of the Hindus there is terrible and they may even get worse in spite of the interim *mariage de convenance* at Delhi. But we must not let our reaction to it become excessive or suggest despair. There must be at least 20 million Hindus in Bengal and they are not going to be exterminated—even Hitler with his scientific methods of massacre could not exterminate the Jews who are still showing themselves very much alive and, as for the Hindu culture, it is not such a weak and fluffy thing as to be easily stamped out; it has lasted through something like five millenniums at least and is going to carry on much longer and has accumulated quite enough power to survive. What is happening did not come to me as a surprise. I foresaw it when I was in Bengal and warned people that it was probable and almost inevitable and that they should be prepared for it. At that time no one attached any value to what I said although some afterwards remembered and admitted, when the trouble first began, that I had been right; only C. R. Das had grave apprehensions and he even told me, when he came to Pondicherry, that he would not like the British to go out until this dangerous problem had been settled. But I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God's victory. *I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world—I am not speaking of personal things—which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even*

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disaster. There was a time when Hitler was victorious everywhere and it seemed certain that the black yoke of the Asura would be imposed on the whole world; but where is Hitler now and where is his rule? Berlin and Nuremberg have marked the end of that dreadful chapter in human History. *Other blacknesses threaten to overshadow or even engulf mankind, but they too will end as that nightmare has ended.*"

"Guru", I pursued again, "I cry like the gasping Goethe: 'more light'! For I miss it today as never before. I have heard so much about the Divine Grace and seen so little of it so far! But I know you will effectively silence me by saying that in a brighter mood I will contradict myself again for the hundredth time, and you will be right. Nevertheless, do tell me what one is to do when, even after being convinced of the advisability of faith—blind, one-eyed, or fully vigilant—one finds that it is as good as nonexistent in one's composition? Was not faith essentially a seal of Krishna's call, a pledge as it were that one was elected by Him? What has surprised me all along the line is that despite my deficiency in faith I should be almost inexhaustibly rich in *vairagya*! But, alas, *vairagya* unlike *bhakti* or knowledge, is essentially negative and faith I lack, although both you and Krishnaprem have driven me to the wall with unanswerable arguments in its favour. In my present state, however, I often catch myself thinking, ruefully, that the man of faith—like his polar opposite, the sceptic—is born, not made. Otherwise why does my faith play truant so persistently?"

To this Gurudev replied once more with a patience as

inexhaustible as my capacity for questioning spiritual truth and yet accepting, paradoxically, the standpoint of *vairagya* that without the light of the spirit, life must remain a dismal grasping at phantoms.

"In your case faith is there, not in your mind, not in your vital but in your psychic being. It was this faith that flung you out of the world and brought you to Pondicherry; it is this faith that keeps you to what the soul wills and refuses to go back on what it had decided. Even the mind's questionings have been a groping after some justification by which it can get an excuse for believing in spite of its difficulties. The vital's eagerness for realisation and its *vairagya* are shadows of this faith, forms which it has taken in order to keep the vital from giving up in spite of the pressure of despondency and struggle. Even in the mind and vital of the men of the strongest mental and vital faith there are periods when the knowledge in the psychic gets covered up—but it persists behind the veil. In you, in spite of your difficulties there is always the knowledge or intuition in the soul that started you on the way. I have been pressing on you the need of faith because the assent has again to take a positive form (*vairagya* is but the negative form of this assent in you) so as to give free way to the Divine Force; but the persistent drive in the soul (which is hidden behind an exteriorly-suppressed faith) is itself sufficient to warrant the expectation of the Grace to come."

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But life not only founds a strange school but teaches its lessons through a strange curriculum. I have often wondered what would have happened to me had I never met Krishnaprem in Lucknow in 1923. Would I have been drawn so early to Sri Aurobindo? That is perhaps not so inconceivable seeing that the seeds of the traditional *vairagya* had been sown in the early soil of my childhood. But what would have happened to me in my spiritual crises in those novitiate days when I wavered so often? Who would have given me, time and again, just that steadying hand-clasp to help me regain my self-poise when it was a case of touch and go with me on the precipice of despair? I do not say this to put it dramatically—as anybody who has practised Yoga will agree—far less to express a conventional type of gratefulness; but perhaps I will sound more convincing if I say I have often felt that Gurudev welcomed Krishnaprem's wise exhortations to me for a twofold reason: in the first place because, being, as I have stressed before, an incredibly tolerant Guru who aimed only at "awakening" rather than "instructing" his disciples, he welcomed every impetus that would help me realise my spiritual potentialities. (This he made clear to me once in a beautiful letter which only he could write with his infinite understanding and compassion: "I have not the slightest idea of disowning you or asking you to go elsewhere or giving you up or asking you to abandon the Yoga or this Yoga. It is not that I insist on your finding the Divine through me and no one else or by this way and no other. I want you to arrive and would be glad to see



you do it by whatever way or with whatever help. But even if you followed another way, your place with me would remain, inwardly, physically and in every way. Even if you walked off to the Himalayas to sit in seclusion till you got something, as I think you sometimes wanted to do, your place would remain waiting for you here. I want you to understand that clearly, and not imagine all sorts of things about cutting off or displeasure or abandonment and the rest of it. Nothing could be further from our minds or from our feeling for you.”) And in the second place because he had seen from the start that Krishnaprem’s exhortations to me would make his own guiding wisdom more acceptable to me. I employ the word ‘acceptable’ advisedly since I have been so often both unable and unwilling to see my way clear when faced by Gurudev’s findings till Krishnaprem came down on me thundering at my irresolution and scepticism. I cannot help marvelling at the strangeness of such a phenomenon—or shall I say providential dispensation—because, obviously, I could never look upon Krishnaprem as Gurudev’s equal in mystic wisdom or Yogic stature. Yet why was it that I needed the elucidations of the lesser to appraise better the clarity of the greater? I know some of my *gurubhais* looked askance at Krishnaprem’s hold over me. In a way they were right. For they might well argue (as in point of fact they did) that Sri Aurobindo had never approved of any outside influence acting on his disciples. But then why did he put his seal on Krishnaprem’s influence over myself knowing full well that the latter would never accept

his direction or even outlook if it ever ran counter to *his* Guru's? Only one explanation occurs to me: that he had faith not only in the spiritual wisdom of Krishnaprem but also in the purity of his love for me. In other words, he knew that Krishnaprem would not misuse the influence he wielded over me precisely because Krishnaprem loved something in me which turned to him in simple trust to be led to the One to whom he himself had given his soul in keeping, prompted by a similar simple confidence.

That is why he once told me in clear terms: "If your Guru, Dilip, should ever think that you had better have no truck with me any more, please remember that I would not only not mind your steering clear of me, but insist on it." I do not think such love has anything in common with what we are accustomed to panegyrisé as 'love'. I need hardly emphasise the unique elements of a love such as this, the less because the true value of such boons can be assessed by experience alone. I will therefore only touch on one last point—to end on a cheerful note: his sense of humour and love of laughter. I have often wondered whether I would have been able to profit so much by his guidance or even appreciate his "British doggedness brought to bear on *sadhana*" as Gurudev once put it, had I not loved his simple cheerfulness which mocked at the stern and the solemn and insisted—but why not judge him by his own judgment when he exhorts us to "save our Yoga from degenerating into that over-conscientious scrupulosity which makes life a hell for many 'religious' people and not only sicklies o'er the native hue of resolution, but, more serious still, dries

up the healing springs of laughter. Once that occurs disaster is certain. Laughter was given by the Gods to man and it was one of their choicest gifts. No animal can laugh nor does it need to, since it lives in the harmony of the purely instinctive life. It is only Man whose possession of an ego introduces stresses and strains which cannot be avoided and for the healing of which, therefore, the Gods gave him this supreme gift. Time and again it will save us when otherwise all would be lost. He who cannot laugh, he whose devotions are too serious for the healing waves of laughter, had better look out: there are breakers ahead!"<sup>1</sup>

But on one occasion, the "stresses and strains" made me feel as if it was going to be the last straw, and in sheer despair I wrote to him that I had decided at long last to be austere like an anchorite to be able to grapple with Yoga in grim earnest: in other words, I was going into a silent seclusion where I would finally give up laughter and cheerfulness and all that made life bearable.

To that he wrote back in haste:

"But what is this awful news about your giving up laughter? Give up anything else you like: arguing, visitors, reading, writing,—but if you give up laughing I, for one, shall weep. I read it out to Moti and she, too, was quite horrified! If you don't at once forswear such an awful heresy I shall never dare to meet you again. It would really be too awful! You would come silently into the room, perhaps brushing away a tear from your eye, and say to me

<sup>1</sup> *The Yoga of Kathopanishad*, Chapter V—Sri Krishnaprem.



in a solemn tone: 'Brother, shall we meditate together a little'? Appalling! And then we should look at each other surreptitiously from downcast eyelids to see whose meditation was deepest! And then: 'Shall we have a little holy talk together, brother?' Ghastly! I don't really believe you can be contemplating anything so dreadful!"

I sent this letter up to Gurudev inviting his opinion: Was sense of humour as relevant to Yoga as it was to life? He wrote back the next morning with his radiant assurance: "Sense of humour? It is the salt of existence. Without it the world would have got utterly out of balance—it is unbalanced enough already—and rushed to blazes long ago."

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Doubtless, to walk in cheerfulness is not easy in this our "vale of tears" where the brightest laughter is fraught with the shadow of pain. Only the bravest of us can achieve it transmuting, by their courage, the heart's pining for what is not but might have been! Fortunately, such spirits are still born to our dismal planet,—self-luminous souls who can walk in the light of their own faith and shed it on others as well. It is in this light that Krishnaprem has been climbing skyward and leading a few others (like his spiritual daughter and disciple, Moti, who is desperately ill<sup>1</sup> but always smiling) initiates who can well claim that they have learnt to laugh even death away, repeating as it were on a rosary:

<sup>1</sup> She died, later, in 1951



“Nabhinandeta maranam nabhinandeta jivanam:  
Kalameva pratiksheta nirdesham bhrityako yatha.”

Death nor life I hymn, but wait  
Like time upon His guidance still:  
I bow to what He would dictate  
As a servant doing his master's will.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MESSAGE OF "SAVITRI"

THERE is an idea abroad that a Yogi or mystic is of a piece with the anchorite, and as such has no message to deliver to humanity at large. What is contended in this view is something interesting because there is a modicum of truth, as Sri Aurobindo wrote to me once, in every intellectual conviction seriously cherished. What is true in this indictment against the mystic is that his contribution to human culture is not conterminous with that of the social man in his various, more or less, social moods. Art, poetry, music, the crafts, philosophy,—in fact every walk of life hitherto trod by men the world over—all fall more or less under the category of our social moods. It has indeed, been claimed by some poets, artists and thinkers that since their handiworks are inspired by their daemons and matured by their faculties *in silence*, therefore what they create cannot be counted, strictly speaking, as a social product. This contention is valid but only up to a point, since what the man in his creative impulse produces is usually a resultant of forces which sway him in his solitude, countered by those that sway him in his social setting. Even the argument of the highbrow, world-alooof scientist, living for his laboratory, cannot be fully valid when he claims that his

findings have nothing to do with humanity and its aspirations. For man being born from others, nurtured by others, living with others, sustained by others and, last though not least, often killed by others, cannot claim to be a perfect solitary in any of his moods on earth. That is why we are confronted almost daily with a paradox, namely, that the most abstract and even seemingly impossible of scientific theories (theories which once upon a time men could only gape at) have been fruitful in inventions which have profoundly modified not only the outer life of man but his thoughts and aspirations as well. "*Tout se tient*" (things lean upon one another and hold together), as Rolland wrote to me once.

Consequently, we do somewhat look askance at mystics and Yogis even when something within us is impressed by something about them which defies our analysis and therefore offends us. It hurts our self-respect: Why must a rational man be led to kowtow to what his reason cannot label or docket? I recall a remark Tagore made years ago. He and Bertrand Russell had once gone out for a stroll in Cambridge. As they passed by King's College Chapel they heard a choral hymn being sung by the boys: lovely music! Tagore suggested to Russell that they step inside the Chapel. "Nothing doing," replied the rationalist mathematician, "I can't let myself be influenced by music and incense and coloured gleams trickling through the stained-glass windows and be *made* to feel what my reason holds suspect." And how Tagore laughed!

But it is not a laughing matter—not to the much-

maligned mystic, anyway. For whatever the scientist and rationalist in man may say, the mystic *knows* what he feels not because he wishes to feel but because he cannot live without feeling it, because life becomes for him a blind alley without the lead of the mystic light, or, to put it in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Impenetrable, a mystery recondite  
Is the vast plan of which we are a part;  
Its harmonies are discords to our view,  
Because we know not the great theme they serve.<sup>1</sup>

Those who hold, with the rationalist, that such themes are "suspect" must, in their turn, be held suspect from the mystic's point of view. For the mystic knows that the sum total of spiritual emoluments are not all made up of the reason's findings any more than what the anatomist's eye sees by dissecting a dead body is the sum total of all that the body is in its full vital functioning. He knows this because he has peeped into something behind the veil and is not only delighted but overawed by what he has glimpsed. He is in fact profoundly impressed because he realises, from what little he has visioned, that:

Inscrutable work the cosmic agencies.  
Only the fringe of a wide surge we see;  
Our instruments have not that greater light,

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book II, Canto V



Our will tunes not with the eternal Will,  
Our heart's sight is too blind and passionate.<sup>1</sup>

From the mystic's point of view—who knows that he has seen what most people have not—there can at best be a deep regret that what has been granted to him has been withheld from the rank and file, but never any question of agreeing with the verdict of those who have not seen what they might have if they had accepted to develop their powers of supraphysical perception. But this does *not* mean that what he has seen is *against* reason. Dean Inge has put the mystic's case rather tellingly when he writes that "...at every step we can only see what we deserve to see. The world that we know changes for us, just as a landscape changes as we climb the mountain. It seems to follow that we have no right to dispute what the mystics tell us that they have seen, unless we have been there ourselves and *not* seen it."<sup>2</sup>

But here Dean Inge only touches the surface of the validity of mystic seeing. It is not only that the "landscape changes" as one rises higher and higher in the mystic knowledge of reality, but that something else happens simultaneously—at least with the greatest among them—namely, what they see imposes on them a corresponding responsibility if not obligation which Sri Aurobindo has described in his noble language as a "divine self-interest to bear the

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book II, Canto V  
*Mysticism in Religion*, Chapter XI

burden of others."<sup>1</sup> This makes them plunge into ceaseless activity, not indeed of the blind or the semi-blind kind hailed by the merely restless activist but of a pure and selfless brand which they undertake because of a mandate they have received from on high to do what has to be done without an eye to the fruit of their action. "Today we all exist in a divided if not anarchic world society of men," says a thoughtful writer. "To follow the example of mystics would mean healing and orderliness, fraternalism and freedom and peace."<sup>2</sup> Or, to put it in the language of Sri Aurobindo, "the greatest of the mystics have always given a luminous lead to men and never acquiesced in a mere passive enjoyment of their bliss, steeped in their solitary contemplation." Because, he asserts, "accepting life he (a *sadhaka* of the Integral Yoga) has to bear not only his own burden, but a great part of the world's burden too along with it, as a continuation of his own sufficiently heavy load. Therefore his Yoga has much more of the nature of a battle than others; but this is not only an individual battle, it is a collective war waged over a considerable country. He has not only to conquer in himself the forces of egoistic falsehood and disorder, but to conquer them as representatives of the same adverse and inexhaustible forces in the world."<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious, that if what is claimed here is valid—that

<sup>1</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga*

<sup>2</sup> *Men Who Walked with God* by Sheldon Cheney (p. 384)

<sup>3</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Chapter II

to win through to the Light is not to turn one's back on those who live in darkness but to help them come out into the sunshine, the sunshine invoked by the true vision—then the mystic's world cannot be dismissed as a world of selfish inaction, euphemistically called "contemplation". Anyone who has ever had the supreme good fortune of living under the aegis of a really great mystic must testify that the latter wants nothing so much as to share the boons he has earned with others, and who will dare deny that this aspiration itself is a living message of Light to the lacklustre?

For the sake of clarity one may perhaps be justified in admitting, provisionally, that the two exist side by side: the social man and the spiritual aspirant. But one must add, to make matters complete, that these are naturally interdependent: the social man needs the spiritual aspirant to enable him progressively to work in the Light the latter cannot help shedding, while the spiritual aspirant needs the other to promote in him the urge and vision to realise himself completely. The great Sage of the Upanishad did not mouth a mere platitude when he said: "One loves one's kin—one's children, consorts and parents—not because they are they but because they are indistinguishable from one's inmost self": he only uttered something the greatest mystics in all climes have proclaimed with one voice: that one must utilize whatever one is given to *serve* others. Or, to put it in the mantric words of the great Messiah of Divine life, the mystic wins God not to rocket up to him leaving the earth to her fate, but to invoke His light here below for all.

But this does not mean that the lure is an imaginary one: the lure of escapism. It would be idle to deny that, human nature being what it is, man generally prefers to travel light. Also, the knot of egoism is fastened so tight in him that he cannot possibly cut it at one trenchant stroke even when he does aspire to Godliness. The anchorite is a real and impressive figure in spite of his unsatisfying gospel of a swift personal salvation because he does help the soul's evolution at a certain stage in life, when the answering Light that comes down seems too all-fulfilling to be missed; but as the soul wants to mount higher still, even the gods themselves, as legend has it, come to deflect him from the path of his highest fulfilment and Supreme Goal. Thus, to put it in the language of exhortation of the Master:

"Imagine not the way is easy; the way is long, arduous, dangerous, difficult. At every step is an ambush, at every turn a pitfall. A thousand seen or unseen enemies will start up against thee, terrible in subtlety against thy ignorance, formidable in power against thy weakness. And when with pain thou hast destroyed them, other thousands will surge up and take their place. Hell will vomit its hordes to oppose and enring and wound and menace; Heaven will meet thee with its pitiless tests and its cold luminous denials.

"Thou shalt find thyself alone in thy anguish, the demons furious in thy path, the Gods unwilling above thee. Ancient and powerful, cruel, unvanquished and close and innumerable are the dark and dreadful Powers that profit by



the reign of Night and Ignorance and would have no change and are hostile. Aloof, slow to arrive, far-off and few and brief in their visits are the Bright Ones who are willing or permitted to succour. Each step forward is a battle. There are precipitous descents, there are unending ascensions and ever higher peaks upon peaks to conquer. Each plateau climbed is but a stage on the way and reveals endless heights beyond it. Each victory thou thinkest the last triumphant struggle proves to be but a prelude to a hundred fierce and perilous battles...."<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo chose the legend of Savitri to bring out not only the "fierceness" of these "perilous battles" but through these the "beautiful face of the Divine Mother" in Savitri, the "Daughter of Infinity" and symbol of Light born to be established in this our world of shadows and limitations.

But the daughter is also the Mother of Mothers who comes to us, weaklings, to show that "Immortality" is not "a plaything to be given lightly to a child," nor "the divine life a prize without effort or the crown for a weakling."<sup>2</sup>

The legend is an old one, even older in age than the *Ramayana* since in this first epic of India Sita makes mention of Savitri and says to Rama: "Know me as flawlessly

<sup>1</sup> Words of the Master—a message of Sri Aurobindo's published posthumously in the *Bulletin of Physical Education*, Vol. III, No. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

faithful to you even as Savitri was to Satyavan, the son of Dyumatsen."<sup>1</sup>

The famous legend as it has come down to us is as beautiful in its simplicity as it is pregnant in its implications. Princess Savitri, the lovely daughter of King Aswapati, wants to marry Satyavan, the son of King Dyumatsen, who having lost his kingdom has been forced to live in a forest, a blind exile. But the Sage Narada tells her that Satyavan is fated to expire within a year, whereupon Savitri reaffirms her pledge to Satyavan saying that her die is cast since she can choose no other for her consort. So the marriage takes place and Savitri leaves her palace and luxury to do her duty by her lonely husband and his helpless parents living as exiles in the forest. The fateful day, however, cannot be stayed and Satyavan dies resting his head on the lap of Savitri. Yama, the Lord of Death, then comes to carry back with him Satyavan's life but Savitri, refusing to admit defeat to Death, follows him. A duologue, or rather an altercation, ensues on the way between the frail victim of Fate and the mighty all-powerful Lord of Destiny till, in the end, Savitri prevails upon the dread Dispenser of Doom to reverse the verdict of Time: Satyavan is at last restored to her.

This is the story. Sri Aurobindo has metamorphosed it into what may be fittingly called a marvellous epic, luminous

<sup>1</sup> *Dyumatsenanutam viram Satyavantam-anuvratām.*

*Sāvitrimivā mām viddhi twamatma-vashavartinīm*

(*Ramayana*: 2.30)

with the message of Immortality. The argument, in brief, is as follows:

The advent of Savitri cannot be an accident. The earth has to aspire for her Descent. So Aswapati has to pave the way through his lordly aspiration—Aswapati, the “colonist from immortality” and the “treasurer of superhuman dreams” whose “soul lived as eternity’s delegate.”<sup>1</sup>

But the heart of flame of this doughty aspirant cannot rest content with a mere realisation. So when he meets the World-Mother face to face the first question he asks her is:

How long shall our spirits battle with the Night  
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,  
We who are vessels of a deathless Force  
And builders of the godhead of the race?<sup>2</sup>

He cannot help asking such a challenging question of the Great Mother because his mighty heart finds little consolation in the current philosophy that a human being must accept his human limitations. So he asks:

Or if it is thy work I do below  
Amid the error and waste of human life  
In the vague light of man’s half-conscious mind,  
Why breaks not in some distant gleam of thee?

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*: Book I, Canto III

<sup>2</sup> *Savitri*: Book III, Canto IV

Ever the centuries and millenniums pass....  
All we have done is ever still to do.  
All breaks and all renews and is the same.<sup>1</sup>

Not that he is a defeatist. How can he be after having seen

...the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers  
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life  
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth....  
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn....  
The massive barrier-breakers of the world....  
The architects of immortality...?<sup>2</sup>

Therefore even though he is eager to see the Kingdom of Heaven established on earth, here and now and feels restless to have to stay a passive witness to human suffering, he says:

I know that thy creation cannot fail....<sup>3</sup>

Because man as he is today—ruling at best by his mind and intellect—is not the final term of the Ascending Consciousness:

This strange irrational product of the mire,  
This compromise between the beast and God,  
Is not the crown of thy miraculous world....

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto IV

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*



Even as of old man came behind the beast  
This high divine successor surely shall come  
Behind man's inefficient mortal pace,  
Behind his vain labour, sweat and blood and tears....<sup>1</sup>

And as the destined

Inheritor of the toil of human time  
He shall take on him the burden of the gods.<sup>2</sup>

He knows all that. Yet the human mind's supine acceptance of the world makes the Divine in the human impatient—inevitably, because without this impatience the impossible cannot be translated into the possible. *Vyakulata* or burning aspiration of the dauntless heart is necessary if the heart is to serve for a foothold of the Divine. So he cries out as it were frantic with the tardy pace of the ascent of Consciousness:

Heavy unchanged weighs still the imperfect world;  
The splendid youth of Time has passed and failed;  
Heavy and long are the years our labour counts  
And still the seals are firm upon man's soul  
And weary is the ancient Mother's heart.<sup>3</sup>

So he appeals passionately:

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto IV

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

O Truth defended in thy secret sun...  
O radiant fountain of the world's delight...  
O Bliss who ever dwellest deep hid within  
While men seek thee outside and never find...  
Mission to earth some living form of thee.  
One moment fill with thy eternity,  
Let thy infinity in one body live,  
All-Knowledge wrap one mind in seas of light,  
All-Love throb single in one human heart.  
Immortal, treading the earth with mortal feet  
All heaven's beauty crowd in earthly limbs!  
Omnipotence, girdle with the power of God  
Movements and moments of a mortal will,  
Pack with the eternal might one human hour  
And with one gesture change all future time.  
Let a great word be spoken from the heights  
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.<sup>1</sup>

Then at long last, his Divine Interlocutor answers assuring him that she, Savitri, will be born:

O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.  
One shall descend and break the iron Law,  
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power.  
A limitless Mind that can contain the world,  
A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms  
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come.

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*: Book III, Canto IV

All mights and greatnesses shall join in her;  
 Beauty shall walk celestial on the earth,  
 Delight shall sleep in the cloud-net of her hair  
 And in her body as on his homing tree  
 Immortal Love shall beat his glorious wings.  
 A music of griefless things shall weave her charm;  
 The harps of the Perfect shall attune her voice,  
 The streams of Heaven shall murmur in her laugh,  
 Her lips shall be the honeycombs of God,  
 Her limbs his golden jars of ecstasy,  
 Her breasts the rapture-flowers of Paradise.  
 She shall bear Wisdom in her voiceless bosom,  
 Strength shall be with her like a conqueror's sword  
 And from her eyes the Eternal's bliss shall gaze.  
 A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,  
 A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;  
 Nature shall overleap her mortal step;  
 Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.<sup>1</sup>

So the Great Sphinx reveals her secret: the incredible comes  
 to pass: the un hoped for incarnation comes down to earth  
 as Aswapati's daughter though none can guess her essential  
 divinity because although

Even her humanity was half-divine,  
 and

Apart, living within, all lives she bore,

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*: Book I, Cantos I & II

she is, intrinsically,

Too unlike the world she came to help and save.

But all the same,

All in her pointed to a nobler kind...

Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,

Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave...<sup>1</sup>

For the *lila* of the Divine to be consummated her human face has, perforce, to be a mask, but even so,

Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;

Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense

Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight

Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives...

A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,

Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;

Love in her was wider than the universe,

The whole world could take refuge in her single heart!<sup>2</sup>

Never was a woman born of flesh limned with hues so ethereal—so incredible yet convincing, so all-embracing yet lonely, so powerful yet tender. It almost seems too dazzling to be true. That is why earthlings now fail to recognise the Incognito and so reject all that She comes to give to earth:

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*: Book I, Canto II

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*



The proud and conscious wideness and the bliss...  
 The calm delight that weds one soul to all,  
 The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy.<sup>1</sup>

We call for the Divine but on our own terms: we know no better. That is why the light-bringers of the world are not accepted as they deserve to be. No wonder Savitri has to realise little by little, to her sorrow, that

There is a darkness in terrestrial things  
 That will not suffer long too glad a note.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently,

On her too closed the inescapable Hand.  
 The armed Immortal bore the snare of Time.

She had to, because unless she accepts the cross of mortality she cannot induce cave-dwellers to welcome her crown of the Everliving. But though she has to accede to this compromise to start with—because otherwise she cannot prepare the ground—she knows that it is but a divine strategy—*reculer pour mieux sauter*—a drawing back to be able to invade the more effectively, because

To wrestle with the Shadow had she come,  
 and

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book, I Canto 1

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

Not to submit and suffer was she born;  
To lead, to deliver was her glorious part.

But the nature of man as it is today cannot succeed even in imagining what supernature is like—not to mention *welcoming* the superhuman. So when Savitri chooses to forsake the protection and plenitude of her father's royal palace, a hue and cry arises. Her mother cannot possibly consent to such "madness" and essays frantically to dissuade her from marrying a poor exile, a nonentity who, besides, is going to die in twelve months. Were it not for exigencies of space, I would give long excerpts from the "Book of Fate" where Sri Aurobindo brings out forcefully this dramatic situation: Savitri is resolved to stake everything for her ideal; her mother, the queen, is afraid of disaster, fear making her pessimistic in the extreme; Narada admonishes the queen and, siding with Savitri, counsels her parents to let her marry Satyavan and lastly, winds up with a revealing prophecy. But as all that is impossible to cite in full, I shall only quote a few lines from his oracular peroration:

Queen, strive no more to change the secret will;  
Time's accidents are steps in its vast scheme.  
Bring not thy brief and helpless human tears  
Across the fathomless moments of a heart  
That knows its single will and God's as one.

For Savitri is *not* human in the ordinary acceptance of

the term but being "an ambassadress twixt eternity and change," she can "sit apart with grief and facing death" front "adverse fate, armed and alone," because

Sometimes one life is charged with earth's destiny,

Therefore, the Sage enjoins on the Queen Mother:

Intervene not in strife too great for thee...

The great are strongest when they stand alone.

Consequently, he proclaims prophetically, when the day will come when "she must stand unhelped"—

On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,

Carrying the world's future in her lonely breast,

Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole...

She must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time

And reach an apex of world-destiny

Where all is won or all is lost for man.

In a word, her destiny of loneliness is meant to forge the last link which will complete the circuit. That is why

In that tremendous silence lone and lost

Of a deciding hour in the world's fate...

Alone she must conquer or alone must fall,

because

No human aid can reach her in that hour,  
No armoured God stand shining at her side,

Therefore the Queen is told:

Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save.  
For this the silent Force came missioned down,

inasmuch as it is preordained about Savitri that

She only can save herself and save the world.

A tremendous prophecy, indeed! But then is not Savitri  
"missioned" to make the impossible possible?—

Here was no fabric of terrestrial make....  
An image fluttering on the screen of fate....  
And tossed along the gulfs of Circumstance.

That is why she has been destined to dare what no human  
could even contemplate:

Her single will opposed the cosmic rule.

And she was justified in flinging this challenge because

The great World Mother now in her arose.



This *is* the stuff of which dramas are made. But Savitri's life being the enactment of a divine drama, starts from scratch, that is the human, and culminates in the super-human. And this deepening drama (of lesser loves calling to the Soul but failing to grip because her lesser loves have, progressively, to give place to the higher and higher through an ascending aspiration—till she has to sacrifice everything to the highest call) has been achieved by the Seer-Poet in his epic drama in six movements of her Soul-evolution:

First, the human in Savitri seeks the Divine.

Second, she weds Satyavan in order to realise through their mutual adoration the Presence of the Divine in every heart of love.

Third, Satyavan dies and she prays to the Lord to give him back to her in order that they may now fulfil their joint mission together—of uplifting the Earth to Heaven, counting no cost.

Fourth, the Divine tempts Savitri to leave such a futile endeavour and invites her to desert earthlings (as the earth is not yet ready for His light and bliss) to merge back in His primal Truth-Consciousness.

Fifth, Savitri declines and asks His boon for Earth and Humanity.

Sixth, the Divine is pleased and grants the Boon of Boons.

This supreme message of *Savitri* to humanity (or rather of Dawn to Night) has been brought out in three progressive stages through the personality of Savitri who is the Incarnation of the All-transcendent Mother-shakti, the Creative Dynamis of the Divine.

First, she wants to realise her highest self through a sense of kinship with all earthlings whom she embraces in her inmost being accepting their "load of Fate" unflinchingly.

Secondly, she wants to induce in them as it were the Godhead that is born in her by the miracle touch of her will which has achieved unison with the Divine Will.

And lastly, she insists on transforming their humanity into utter Divinity by the alchemy of her soul-force overriding Fate, staking her all for the All-in-All.

The whole history and drama of this evolution in and through her is the *Leitmotif* of this epic poem—the mighty theme, the vibrant symphony. I would have liked to quote copiously from the earlier cantos to trace the evolution of this mighty diapason. But as that is not possible I shall have to be content with quoting only a few cogent extracts from the "Book of Everlasting Day" to illustrate how Sri Aurobindo has depicted in his *mantric* epic the movements to which I have referred.

Savitri comes first to petition the Divine that Satyavan to whom death has come prematurely be restored to her:

I know that I can lift man's soul to God,  
I know that he can bring the Immortal down....  
Give not to darkness and to death thy sun,  
Achieve thy wisdom's hidden firm decree  
And the mandate of thy secret world-wide love.

His first answer comes almost as an admonition:

How shall earth-nature and man's nature rise  
To the celestial levels, yet the earth abide?

Then after telling her that the gulf between Heaven and Earth cannot be bridged here and now (because Earth is still too far from the Consciousness of Heaven) the Lord says that though Earth may indeed espy a few stray gleams from Heaven's starland,

They are a Light that fails, a Word soon hushed  
And nothing they mean can stay for long on earth.  
These are the high glimpses, not the lasting sight.

For though He admits that

A few can climb to an unperishing sun,  
Or live on the edges of the mystic moon,

yet is it not a stark fact borne out by history that

The heroes and the demi-gods are few  
To whom the close immortal voices speak?

True, the Divine Voice is heard through silence, but then

Few are the silences in which Truth is heard,  
Unveiling the timeless utterance in her deeps,

And though the great seers can and do win through to

something of the Light Divine which means so much to earth, yet

Few are the splendid moments of the seers.  
Heaven's call is rare, rarer the heart that heeds;  
The doors of light are sealed to common mind.

And if

Men answer to the touch of greater things,  
quickly enough

They slide back to the mud from which they climbed.

Thus after damping her widowed ardour with such unanswerable arguments He enjoins on her:

Leave to its imperfect light the earthly race:  
All shall be done by the long act of Time,....  
Break into eternity thy mortal mould;  
Melt, Lightning, into thy invisible flame.  
Clasp, Ocean, deep into thyself thy wave,  
Happy for ever in the embosoming surge.

This was the Divine *lila* of testing her as it is to come out directly—in the *denouement*. But as Savitri does not know this yet, she has to follow the lead of the highest light in her and so answers the "radiant God", a sunbeam answering the Sun:



In vain thou temptst with solitary bliss  
 Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;  
 My soul and his indissolubly linked  
 In the one task for which our lives were born  
 To raise the world to God in deathless Light,  
 To bring God down to the world on earth we came,  
 To change the earthly life to life divine.  
 I keep my will to save the world and man;  
 Even the charm of thy alluring voice,  
 O blissful godhead, cannot seize and snare.  
 I sacrifice not earth to happier worlds.

A great answer of a great soul which has definitely turned its back on defeatism even against desperate odds. For Sri Aurobindo is *not* earth-averse. Has he not heard Earth's moving song so vibrant in his marvellous poem, *The Life Heavens*:

I, Earth, have a deeper power than Heaven;  
 My lonely sorrow surpasses its rose-joys,  
 A red and bitter seed of the raptures seven;—  
 My dumbness fills with echoes of a far Voice.

Whether those who have not heard this her great message believe him or not he does not care for *he* has heard it as he wrote to me in an explanatory letter (when I asked him in despair how could such an inglorious, disharmonious and creaturely thing as our earth be redeemed):

"All the non-evolutionary worlds are worlds limited

to their own harmony like the 'life heavens'. The Earth, on the other hand, is an evolutionary world, not at all glorious or harmonious even as a material world (except in certain appearances) but rather most sorrowful, disharmonious, imperfect. Yet in that imperfection is the urge towards a higher and more many-sided perfection. It contains the last finite which yet yearns to the Supreme Infinite, it is not satisfied by sense joys precisely because in the conditions of the earth it is able to see their limitations. God is pent in the mire—mire is not glorious, so there is no claim to glory or beauty here—but the very fact imposes a necessity to break through that prison to a consciousness which is ever rising towards the heights."

It is true, as he admitted in the same letter, that at present, so long as the earth remains as supine as she is, there can be "no question of a divine life". Nevertheless, as he indicates in his poem, *A God's Labour*:

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth  
And the undying suns here burn;  
Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth  
The incarnate spirits yearn

Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss:  
Down a gold-red stair-way wend  
The radiant children of Paradise  
Clarioning darkness's end.

No one can possibly understand Sri Aurobindo until he has

learnt to take full account of his appreciation of the glorious divine potentiality lying latent in what he terms "the earth-consciousness." This we find in his *Ideal of Human Unity*, in his *Life Divine* and lastly, in the constant emphasis in his *Integral Yoga* on the nature of the Divine that is sought, who is "not a remote extra-cosmic reality, but a half-veiled Manifestation present and near us here in the universe." And it is because he has known this through the sanction of the Supreme in his missioned soul that he asseverates again and again that it is "here, in life, on earth in the body that we have to unveil the Godhead."

He has stressed this tirelessly to us in his various letters and messages till in *Savitri* he repeats it with the luminous accent of the inspired Word that is Poetry. So *Savitri* posits that earth-life must translate a Divine Purpose, because—

If earth can look up to the light of heaven  
And hear an answer to her lonely cry,  
Not vain their meeting, nor heaven's touch a snare.

And here is her reason dictated not by her brain but her heart:

If thou and I are true, the world is true;  
Although thou hide thyself behind thy works,  
To be is not a senseless paradox;  
Since God has made earth, earth must make in her God;  
What hides within her breast she must reveal.  
I claim thee for the world that thou hast made.

To which the propitiated Godhead answers, beginning to relent:

Thou art my vision and my will and voice....

But impatience is still to be deprecated:

Lead not the spirit in an ignorant world  
To dare too soon the adventure of the Light.

The same note of warning was sounded, in a previous Canto, to Savitri's father, Aswapati:

Let not the impatient Titan drive thy heart....  
Awake not the immeasurable descent,

because

Truth born too soon might break the imperfect earth.

But what Aswapati could not afford to disobey, Savitri can, because her soul *is* the last perfection of the aspiring Incarnation:

A wonderful mother of unnumbered souls  
Bearing the burden of universal love.

Therefore when she is invited—or rather tempted—for the last time by the assaying Godhead who offers her a quick



exit out of the dismal world still unready for "the Immeasurable Descent":

Choose, spirit, thy supreme choice not given again,  
as there is still time to choose Nirvana bringing in its train an

End of the trouble of thy wandering thoughts,  
Close of the journeying of thy pilgrim soul.  
Accept, O music, weariness of thy notes,  
O stream, wide breaking of thy channel banks.

But the indomitable spirit of Savitri obstinately declines to accept a merely "personal salvation". She, indeed, craves His boon but for the whole world:

Thy peace, O Lord, a boon within to keep  
Amid the roar and ruin of wild Time  
For the magnificent soul of man on earth.  
Thy calm, O Lord, that bears thy hands of joy...  
Thy oneness, Lord, in many approaching hearts.

But—as Sri Aurobindo wrote to me once in a letter—the Divine subjects His Incarnations to the fieriest of ordeals; so He asks her once again to reconsider her refusal to comply with His invitation:

A third time swelled the great admonishing call:  
"I spread abroad the refuge of my wings."

In other words, He asks her to seek final asylum under His wings where there is only peace and silence.

But Savitri is not to be deflected from the Goal: what is offered to her must be offered to *all*. So—

... passionately the woman's heart replied:  
"Thy energy, Lord, to seize on woman and man,  
To take all things and creatures in their grief  
And gather them into a mother's arms."

Still God insists, for the last time:

A last great time the warning sound was heard:  
"I open the wide eye of solitude  
To uncover the voiceless rapture of my bliss,...  
Motionless in the slumber of ecstasy,  
Resting from the sweet madness of the dance  
Out of whose beat the throb of hearts was borne."

But Savitri declines again and appeals to Him to deliver *all*, as against the elect, from the pain of life—to vouchsafe to *all*

"Thy embrace which rends the living knot of pain,  
Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures breathe,  
Thy magic flowing waters of deep love,  
Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men".

Every authentic mystic knows that the Godhead's injunction to his devotee evolves with the latter's inner evolution.

Everyone receives but in the measure of his receptivity. That is why Dhruva was first offered a Kingdom and only when he refused it was he deemed eligible for the Boon of the Vaikuntha. The lesser mystics are often content with inferior boons but, as they evolve, their aspiration too becomes greatedened. That is, the lesser boons are offered to comparatively lesser hungers. Sri Aurobindo himself, as he said to us explicitly, had come to the Yoga to liberate his country but as he delved deeper, his lesser loves gave place to the greater till he wanted the Divine Bliss and Light for *all*, not for himself and his countrymen only. That is why he heard the Voice also ascending in pitch and deepening in timbre as he progressed more and more in his *sadhana*, till he compelled as it were the last sanction of the Supreme to his summit prayer voiced through Savitri:

Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men.

"Seek and thou shalt find." He sought and found, and as he turned progressively deaf to the lesser appeals, he heard the answering Music too mount higher and higher in harmony and grandeur. This he has expressed in the final answer of the Godhead given to Savitri who is at long last granted the *one* boon she has sought:

O beautiful body of the incarnate Word,  
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken with thy voice.  
My will is thine, what thou hast chosen I choose.  
All thou hast asked I give to earth and men...

I lay my hands upon thy soul of flame,  
I lay my hands upon thy heart of love.,  
I yoke thee to my power of work in Time.

And this He concedes because He has assayed Savitri and  
not found her wanting—

Because thou hast obeyed my timeless will,  
Because thou hast chosen to share earth's struggle and  
fate

And leaned in pity over earth-bound men  
And turned aside to help and yearned to save,  
I bind by thy heart's passion thy heart to mine  
And lay my splendid yoke upon thy soul.

And not content with a mere reassurance, He cries out  
apocalyptically:

O Sun-Word, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light  
And bring down God into the lives of men;  
Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,  
My garden of life to plant a seed divine.  
When all thy work in human time is done,  
The mind of earth shall be a home of light,  
The life of earth a tree growing towards heaven,  
The body of earth a tabernacle of God.

And therefore she, acting as the divine intermediary, will  
bring to the earth the Boon of boons—the Divine Grace



and Love acting in its native power of bliss and light. For this to be possible the Divine must use her as His radiant Representative, the Avatar:

I will pour delight from thee as from a jar,  
I will whirl thee as my chariot through the ways,  
I will use thee as my sword and as my lyre,  
I will play on thee my minstrelsies of thought.

And then she with Satyavan will be doing His Will:

You shall reveal to them the hidden eternities,  
The breath of infinitudes not yet revealed,  
Some rapture of the bliss that made the world,  
Some rush of the force of God's omnipotence,  
Some beam of the omniscient Mystery.

And at that fateful hour—

The Mighty Mother shall take birth in Time  
And God be born into the human clay  
In forms made ready by your human lives.  
Then shall the Truth supreme be given to men....  
The superman shall wake in mortal man  
And manifest the hidden demi-god  
Or grow into the God-Light and God-Force  
Revealing the secret deity in the cave....  
Annulling the decree of death and pain,  
Erasing the formulas of the Ignorance....  
Ruling earth-nature by eternity's law....

When

Life's tops shall flame with the Immortal's thoughts,  
Light shall invade the darkness of its base,

because

When superman is born as Nature's king  
His presence shall transfigure Matter's world:  
He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's night,  
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's greater law;  
Man too shall turn towards the Spirit's call.

And then—

A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell  
And take the charge of breath and speech and act  
And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns  
And every feeling a celestial thrill....  
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,  
The Spirit shall take up the human play,  
This earthly life become the life divine.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MOTHER

IN the preceding chapters I kept the Mother somewhat in the background because to the superficial view hers must appear a personality very distinct from that of Sri Aurobindo. But one who has won to the deeper vision and tried to follow the phenomenal growth of the Ashram cannot but be persuaded that without her dominant presence, superhuman patience and genius for organization (not to mention her ineffable personality of light and grace and courage) Sri Aurobindo's Synthetic Yoga would never have found the convincing shape it has: in other words, his gospel could not have found an adequate medium of expression in the practical field. But even this is by no means the whole story. For none can hope to understand Sri Aurobindo fully without a basic understanding of his estimate of the place of the Mother's divinity in his Yoga. One of his oldest and staunchest disciples, Rajani Palit, wrote to him (in August, 1938): "There are many who hold that the Mother was human once upon a time—to judge from her *Prayers*—but has outgrown her humanity through her *sadhana*. But to my psychic feeling, she is the Mother Divine herself, putting on the cloak of obscurity and suffering in order that we, humans, may be delivered

out of our ignorance into knowledge, and out of our suffering into bliss."

To that Sri Aurobindo replied categorically: "The Divine puts on an appearance of humanity, assumes the outward human nature in order to tread the path and show it to human beings, but does not cease to be the 'Divine'. It is a manifestation that takes place, a manifestation of a growing Divine consciousness, *not human turning into divine*. The Mother was inwardly above the human even in childhood. So the view held by 'many' is erroneous."

It will serve no useful purpose to go into the why and wherefore of it all. For after all the recognition of the Mother's greatness or her Yogic Force is not like the positing of a scientific hypothesis to be 'assumed and accepted tentatively' subject to revision and modification as new data come to light. Still, as one of the major aims of my reminiscences is to testify to Yogic truths and experiences as I and others have realised them in the Ashram, a personal impression of the Mother may well be recorded here as germane to my purpose. Naturally, I hesitate to deal with a personality such as the Mother's in such a summary fashion, but she will, I hope, pardon such babbling tributes knowing that even in our inspired moods we can hardly expect to express more than a fraction of what we owe to her.

I shall describe in brief my first experience of her Force since it may help my readers to glimpse in her what we ourselves did intermittently in the course of our day-to-day struggles with our obstinate egos opposing her will.



When I met her for the first time in August 1928, I was struck by her sweet personality and felt a deep exhilaration which I could not account for. The joy left a cadence of music in my heart though, of course, there could be no question of surrendering my will to hers. The first question I asked her was whether what Sri Aurobindo called the Yogic Force acting through her personality could achieve anything "tangible".

She gave me an amused smile.

"What do you mean by 'tangible'?"

"You see, Mother," I answered, "I have been praying daily before Sri Ramakrishna's photograph for years—since my adolescence. But though I have often felt an upsurge of *bhakti*, I have never yet felt anything else, far less seen any gardens of gleam, letters of light, figures of flame etc. I have therefore come to the conclusion that I am too opaque to the inward ray of the spirit. I know really less than nothing about Yogic Force. Let me add that though my interest in life as it is is fast petering out I cannot yet make up my mind to take the plunge—breaking away from my moorings. To cut a long story short, I would ask you if you could possibly initiate me in your Yoga—for I understand I have to obtain initiation, first and last, from you. I can accept to wait till I feel more sure about your Yogic Force being a living reality. My position is this: I can stake everything I still cherish—but only for something real and concrete, *not something vague and apocryphal*. In short, I cannot take a leap blindfold into the unknown. So I have come to ask you very 'simply—

but trenchantly—whether you can possibly give me a trial so as to convince me about the reality of your Yogic Force. But mind you, I want the Force to speak to me in a way which cannot possibly be explained away as auto-suggestion, wishful thinking or hallucination.”

Mother smiled once more.

“I can try”, she said simply. “You are at the Hotel? When do you retire for the night? At nine? Meditate at that hour in your room—try to open yourself to me and I will concentrate on you from here. Maybe you will get something which cannot be explained away even by such impressive names scientific or otherwise.”

(I have of course given here, as usual, only the gist of our talk. But as we did not talk of anything very profound I can claim to have given a fairly faithful description of what passed between us on the 16th August, 1928.)

The experience came in a most curious way. As, after dinner, I went up to my room in the Hotel, I sat down on the floor. It was quite cool with the fan whirling at top speed. I must here inform the reader that I have never been timid by nature, nor had I, hitherto, ever experienced anything eerie or even strange during my meditations. An old disciple had indeed once advised me, casually, to take the Mother’s name should anything ‘untoward’ happen. But I had only smiled at the word. How could anything untoward happen to me when I only wanted Krishna? Besides, ghosts and spirits were too fantastic to be able to exist except, of course, as vapours of a heated brain.

So, naturally, I sat down to meditation in a flawlessly confident mood. I did indeed expect to see so many things: lights, colours, some figures, with luck may be even a radiant form—who knows? But then, I told myself, I must be on my guard: strong desires and expectations might very well take shape as forms in one's meditation and auto-suggestion must, above all, be staved off—and so on. In short, in my wise folly, I was unwittingly arming myself with vigilance against my Gurus.

Suddenly I found my body stiffening and I started perspiring profusely; then—to complete my discomfiture—my heart beat so fast that I got scared. What is all this? Suddenly I remembered and took the Mother's name. At once the palpitation ceased. But I was wet all over with perspiration, and the tension in my body increased till my muscles became so stiff that I felt a positive pain.

As soon as the palpitation ceased, my fear left me but not my astonishment. For, palpably, some extraneous force *was* acting on my body—a force the like of which I had never experienced so vividly before! Also, obviously, it had nothing to do with auto-suggestion since I had never even imagined that an invisible Force could so convincingly twist the live, material muscles of a strong sceptic—healthy, wide-awake and normal to his fingertips! So I did not know what to make of it all: what came to pass was too outlandish to be true and yet wasn't it too concrete to be dismissed as fanciful!



But that was, alas, all. I saw nothing—not even a grasshopper, to say nothing of a benevolent deity—felt no joy, no peace, no strength, no *bhakti*. Most disappointing and yet in a way so utterly, overwhelmingly impressive! For a person almost inaccessible to fear was here getting scared, a heart which had never palpitated was fluttering causelessly! And last, though not least, profuse perspiration, in a cool room, attended by the sensation of one's muscles being actually manhandled all over one's body! I was convinced that a definite Force was taking liberties with me—albeit in an almost impertinent if not lunatic way!

Next morning, after relating to Mother the whole gamut of my curious experiences, I asked her why she had so oddly wanted to cause me this kind of meaningless pain when she could well have given me peace and joy and so many other things worth while.

"But I didn't want to cause you pain at all," she laughed, vastly tickled. "Only, you were resisting, so my Force could not give you the peace and joy which you would have felt if you had not opposed it tooth and nail, with all the weapons of your wise scepticism and assured ignorance. One must have trust in the Divine."

"But you need not worry," she added, mollifyingly, "for I have found you quite receptive. I will say no more now. Go on with your meditations: my help will always be with you. The tension and pain will disappear after a week or two—or perhaps sooner if you can manage to trust the Divine Grace which brought you to Sri Aurobindo."



What she had foretold came to pass afterwards in due course. I was impressed, naturally. So there were, *really and literally*, "more things in heaven and earth" than could be dreamt of by the "philosophy" of reason and science! It is all very well to talk contemptuously of supernatural phenomena (didn't the Christ castigate the itch for a "sign" as vulgar?) but when these fall within our ken and can be traced to the agency of one whom we sincerely esteem, an indelible mark is left, inevitably, on our minds. So henceforth I began to look upon the Mother as superior to all of us put together, even though my highbrow reason wanted to dismiss such powers rather summarily. Besides, was she not primarily responsible for my heightened respect for the occult powers of Yoga which in its turn helped me weather the storm of opposition I had to pass through before I could come to port at her feet for good?

I say 'for good' because I mean it. Not that I have not often wanted also to leave 'for good', thanks to my strong self-will, but even in my worst moods I knew full well that I would never be able to cut away from my moorings—in the last resort. I often recited in self-felicitation (calling myself a sincere fellow on top of being a "good man") the Lord's challenge to Mephistopheles:

Ein guter Mensch in seinem dunklen Drange  
Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewusst<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's *Faust* :

A good man, however driven by his blind impulse,  
Shall stay ever conscious of the homeward way.

But though in my heart of hearts I knew that it could not possibly be otherwise, in the thick of my crises I have often felt like throwing up the sponge when nothing but her active help and sustaining Grace could have kept me from swerving from the right movement, "the homeward way". For although I have, in my wrong moods, often enough wanted to go over her head to Sri Aurobindo for redress, I have been fully conscious every time that had she not been as lenient as she was, I would never have won his support when I thus appealed to his adjudication as against hers. I make mention of this to stress not only her leniency and tolerance but also her understanding of the deep streak of perversity, inherent in human nature, which remains one of the greatest hurdles our aspiration has to cross—a task we could never have achieved had she not forgiven our lapses and misdemeanours again and again.

I have hinted already at her greatness which could forgive so readily and will have a good deal more to say about it in the concluding chapter. I can tell, besides, of a number of instances in which her soul of compassion tolerated and forgave even dire treachery on the part of some of her irredeemable disciples. But I cannot recall a more convincing instance than the one I am going to relate: convincing because it moved and overawed even the sturdy heart of rebellion in me which has been responsible, by and large, for my darkest sufferings on the path of Yoga.

It happened in the thirties. I have forgotten the genesis of my trouble—the exact pinprick to my susceptibility which was the cause of the resultant septicemia—but shall

I ever forget the revelation which followed? But I must first give a picture of the context.

In those days I, like many another, used to see the Mother once a week to have an intimate talk. Something happened which made me conclude hastily that she had done me a grave injustice in believing a false allegation against me. So I sent her word that I would meet her no more as I owed her no allegiance whatsoever. At the same time I wrote a long letter to Sri Aurobindo telling him that I had come to the Ashram for him alone, so that if he decided the case in her favour as against mine I would sooner leave the Ashram than submit to injustice. Then I went off at a mad tangent and added that she seemed displeased with me presumably for loving him more but I could not help it and did not think that love could be diverted like water in any direction one liked. Besides, I reminded him, I had accepted her only because he had wished it and so I went on in this utterly "dare-divine" strain till I wrote to the Mother herself:

"If you choose to frown on me because I love Sri Aurobindo more than yorself, than I must stay impenitent since I did come here *primarily* for him and accepted you because *he* had wanted me to turn to you. I never made a secret of this, as I saw no reason why I should stifle the voice of truth. I know full well that he will never approve of my placing him above yourself but as that is my present feeling I cannot behave as if it were otherwise. Now you can do your worst: I am ready to leave this evening; only *he* will have to dismiss me personally, remember! For I can take no orders from *you*."



I was desperate, obviously, and although in my extremity I still repeated Goethe's couplet about the good man being saved at the eleventh hour, I did not see how I was to be spared the consequences of my own gratuitous insolence. So I brooded in my abysmal gloom when Sri Nolini Gupta came to me with a message from her: she wished to see me. "But I am not going to submit to being frowned upon," I snapped. "I am only waiting for a letter of dismissal from Gurudev and as soon as it comes I will clear out."

"Mother has no intention of frowning on you," he said. "For she told me it was a case of pure misunderstanding. 'At all events,' he pleaded, 'you should not be so discourteous as to refuse to see her when she personally summons you to be able to explain it all.'"

I went—sullenly.

Mother smiled at me as only she could, in the circumstances. I could hardly believe my eyes! But her unexpected sweet smile sent a thought flashing through me which I can only describe by the epithet "heart-warming." So all is not lost—not yet! And simultaneously, I felt how much I depended on just that one smile of hers even when I defiantly asserted that she was nothing to me. How could one stay in such a God-forsaken seclusion unaccompanied by her smile and loving support? Besides, hadn't she revealed to us on so many occasions that her ways were radically different from those of a moralist reforming with rhetoric or of a school-mistress correcting with a cane? Had I not borne witness myself to so many instances of her forbearance and charity? All such thoughts pullulated in me, induced by



her one fecund smile. Then as I sat down on the floor (she was sitting on a divan with her beautiful hair let loose), she placed a hand on my shoulder and looked steadfastly at me. I fought bravely with my unruly tears.

"But can I possibly be angry with anyone who loves Sri Aurobindo as you do?" she said, very simply. Her eyes radiated a strange light, a marvellous blend of strength, tenderness and humility. "My own feelings apart, do I not know how Sri Aurobindo cherishes you? So how could you think it possible for me to frown upon one whom *he* greets with a smile? Am I not here to serve him with all I have and am — even as you, his near and dear disciples, are?"

She would have said more had I not burst into tears.



That day I had a new glimpse (or shall I say vision?) of humility derived from true spiritual reverence. I accepted her *on her own* as my spiritual Mother on that morning — of my full and final initiation.

I have often enough, in my wrong moods, criticized her — sometimes with no excuse at all, at others goaded by a misunderstanding, and every time has she come down to me to explain her point of view, never once minding the hurt of insults but, withal, never letting truth down. But there, alas, lay the crux of the difficulty for such as we. For it was her cleaving to truth which we so often misinterpreted as hardness, not realising that she could scarcely have

grown to her stature had she faltered the least in her stand on the plinth of truth. Notwithstanding, we wanted so often to ingratiate ourselves with her through dissimulation, hoping she would never find it out. But though she could forgive again and again to give delinquents "yet another chance", she could not be *cheated* because she had won, through her *sadhana*, the touchstone of insight and spiritual wisdom. But knowing little of such wisdom, we failed to realise how it could help her assay the truth about our struggling selves. I shall end this chapter with a talk I had with her nearly twenty years ago—1932, to be more precise—with no other object than to delineate how her wisdom impressed me. But I warn my reader that it is going to be just a random sample of her talk abridged to my understanding. For though I got Sri Aurobindo to revise my report then, I cannot possibly claim that it does anything like justice to her marvellous power of expressing simply what is perforce passing complex. Besides, in twenty years she too has grown (Sri Aurobindo wrote to me once that in the way of the spirit one can and must always rise higher and higher and dive deeper and deeper). So I do not know if she will approve of what was once approved two decades ago. But as I shall be submitting this to her once again for her final revision and seal I need not be too apologetic about the inadequacy of my report.<sup>1</sup> For obviously, I can only imbibe her in the measure of my receptivity.

<sup>1</sup> This whole chapter was read and sanctioned in toto for publication by the Mother herself.

So I may offer what little I can, hoping that it may reveal at least a fraction of what she wanted to convey.

The occasion was a Bengali song which I had composed in the Sanskrit *mandakranta* metre. In a musical soir  e I had sung it to her and others within the Ashram precincts. Sri Aurobindo (who had heard it from his room) wrote to me: "Your song Nada, 'Sound', is truly wonderful and it is a beautiful poem too". I give below my English translation:

Who is she, the formless, gleaming and hurtling  
Through the skies in the lightning's flares!  
Who is she, the fearless, loud in the clanging  
Of the storm and its frenzied blares!  
Who is she, there dancing deep in the roar  
And the raging orgies of the ocean,  
Resonant in the ululation on high  
And the cloudland's booms of explosion.  
Who is she, the bounteous, comes dissolving  
As rain in a mystic murmur  
To her children appealing in the heart's awed hush  
As the Mother of sleep, the soul-charmer!  
All the world breaks out in love's diapason:  
"To the stricken on the brink of disaster  
After the deluge of darkling doom  
Thou com'st as redeeming lustre."

She greeted me with her usual beaming smile as I entered her *sanctum sanctorum* where she used to meditate with us individually, when many people had many kinds of experiences. Also she used to tell us of things she had seen within us. Only those who have had such confidential interviews with her know how much she could and did give in those days through her exquisite touch, smile, glance and talk. I could only meditate perfunctorily with her because I was always looking forward eagerly to the talk that would follow. She knew it and so she never meditated long with me. To each she gave according to his need.

So after the short meditation I looked up and met her eyes.

"Your song on sound last evening," she said, "was power, power, power all through. You expressed the conflicts of Nature so powerfully and truly that I was very pleased. I saw descending upon you from above an intense white light with a great power. Under its pressure there was proceeding from you a very generous outflow of vital force—in the best sense of the term—on to all round you. And the resolution of the conflicts into the chords of Victory was remarkable. Then, above some of the notes you sang, I contacted a vast Peace and Ananda, which will be expressed more amply in the measure of your progressive identification with what inspired it. But even at this stage of your *sadhana* the peace that was waiting lasted fairly long and in some portions of your music I saw you were not you but Music itself."

"That is what constitutes genius," she added with one of her rarest smiles. "You know I do not believe in paying compliments. I tell you this simply because I *saw* it."



"I am overjoyed, Mother," I said. "Only I wish the peace and bliss you contacted might endure a little longer."

"I wish it no less," she returned. "In fact it has been part of my endeavour to make it stay permanently. But as you haven't yet experienced it, it didn't endure. Nevertheless, the notes you sang on Peace rang, at times, with an intensely concentrated fervour. Your theme was 'Sound', wasn't it? It was effectively expressed. The *finale* towards which it was leading was the grandeur of the descent into this world of a harmony which is not beyond its reach, and that reminded me of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. You have heard it, haven't you?" I nodded

"Your music yesterday seemed to me to be making an opening towards that grand Power, of course, not in the European but in the Indian way—and not yet in its native amplitude and glory but in the full process of formation and crystallisation.

"Great geniuses, when they truly achieve great things," she continued, "lose the sense of their separate ego and identity—*namarupa*—and become the thing itself, the thing they manifest; so it was with you when you sang certain of those notes, which were truly marvellous. What you invoked could not come down to stay, I repeat, at this stage of your *sadhana*, but when you will have had the full experience of the Divine—it will come down fully and permanently—when you will have touched the acme of your personality. It is not yet come, but it is fast coming. And the white Light descending on you, which was flowing and reaching others was dazzling, like, what shall I say?—you have seen

snowy mountain-tops reflecting a dazzling white light, haven't you?"

"Yes, Mother," I said, thrilled. I hung on her every word now.

"The light I saw round you was like that," she said. "It was a descent of Power—Power.....concentrated."

"It is so pleasing to me," she went on "to see true and rapid growth in people, to see them evolving, that is, rising higher and higher progressively."

"But how about being ambitious, Mother?" I asked. "For sometimes I feel I am not getting on famously because I am still a little too athirst for fame."

"I always blame people for not being ambitious enough," she rejoined. "I always tell people: be more ambitious—ambitious to grow, ambitious to be divine warriors, ambitious to achieve things really worth while. The only thing is: the ego's human limitations have to be consciously transcended since otherwise unimpeded and true growth is not possible. Let it be your ambition to be content with nothing less than the highest."

"I have latterly had some inexplicable and, if I may say so, curiously vivid feelings, Mother," I said, "I have felt again and again that I must grow and grow as never before: only I must purge myself of all cravings—like personal ambition. A voice cries out to me insistently that I must strive all the time to dedicate my gifts—such as they are—to the Divine as a loyal servant does to his master. And I am glad to say that now-a-days I do not feel tempted, as

I used to formerly, to exploit my capacities for purely personal ends. My greatest defect in this connection seems to be that I am still extremely sensitive to praise—even of charlatans. Only," I added smiling, as she smiled back at me, "fortunately for me, such praise comes my way but rarely, since they are saying all sorts of things against me outside, as you know."

"What have you to do with appreciation, here or outside, whether of connoisseurs or charlatans, since you know that you came for the Divine sincerely and that the Divine has attested it by accepting you? Let the whole world misunderstand you, how *can* it make the least difference now—so far as you are concerned?"

"But you need not look so frightfully abashed," she added, twinkling at me and patting me on the hand, "few are the artists who are not avid of praise, who don't doubt but that the world has been created to revolve around them, and if far more serious defects of your character have had their backs broken already, your fame-hunger, the clinging leech, too, will have to capitulate some day—don't you worry. Your difficulties will then disappear at one sweep, I tell you. Incidentally, I saw this once again yesterday, while you were producing certain specific notes, when—as I told you just now—I saw you no longer as Dilip, but as Music pure: then flashed before me your true being—which, by the way, is an old acquaintance of mine—a splendid being. But about this I would rather not speak now—as I want you to realise it yourself—why, you will know later on."



"You take my breath away, Mother," I said. "Only, my mind is incorrigible, you know, and keeps on saying that I am too unreceptive and normal by constitution to the miracle—the impossible. So I have to sigh and say to myself: never mind, be yourself, since that is the utmost you can do—when all is said and done."

"But what is the meaning of being oneself, may I ask?" Mother returned quickly. "Most people accept their limitations and, identifying themselves with their limited selves, say gloomily: 'This is what we are!' But that is all nonsense. You cannot equate yourself with your surface personality any more than you can equate the man to be with the embryo, or the tree to come with the sapling. It is only when you have realised the Divine that you can say that you have met your real self. We get a glimpse of this truth when we see a genius making the impossible possible—which he does because it is his *métier*. But how does he achieve such miracles? Simply by refusing to identify himself with what he is on his lower levels: in other words, by transcending the mould of his unevolved personality and identifying himself with his inspiration, more or less. Do you understand?"

"Do you mean one has to equate oneself first with what one expresses?"

"You may put it that way," she said, "for that too is a way, as you yourself achieved partly yesterday while you were singing—that is what I meant by saying that while you were singing you became one with what you expressed or rather with what got expressed through you. But you



must not infer from this that it is the only way. In fact the way varies with the temperament."

"Is that the reason why Sri Aurobindo has written in his *Synthesis of Yoga* that everyone must find out his own Yoga?"

Mother nodded.

"And that is why we say that what we prescribe for one is for himself alone and must not be taken as a general prescription or rule for all. But to come back to your music."

She gave me a very kind look. I was thrilled. For she had never before spoken to me about my own music so intimately and appreciatively. Unfortunately I missed much of what she said. What I could grasp I will reproduce below but more as a gist than as a verbatim report:

"It is very remarkable and interesting", she went on, "to trace the changes and evolution in your music and creative power. The fund of vital force in you one day suddenly turned and from that day forth your music was fundamentally altered in its character and outlook; you have continued ever since to succeed, progressively, in expressing what you sang. For instance, when you sang your song on Kali the other day, she actually appeared in the subtle and danced before my eyes, as I told you, and also her characteristic red colour appeared. When you sang of Shiva, he actually came and stood before me and you. When you sang of Krishna, the blue colour, which is *His* colour, appeared and, just when your aspiration mounted and He was about to manifest Himself, you stopped."

"I regret so much, Mother," I said smiling. "I wish I had known, for I would then have emitted 'a cry that shivers to the tingling stars'."

"No matter," said Mother, giving me an answering smile. "The stars will tingle all right—all in good time. Besides, Krishna is difficult to invoke in this way, much more difficult than Kali. But what I am emphasising is that you have been succeeding more and more in expressing your theme: the white light which developed yesterday is an instance in point."

"I see a most beautiful lambent golden shimmer on your face, Mother," I exclaimed in great joy, "and do you know, this morning I saw a most lovely green on the wall—like a tongue of flame! But though such things I have seen, I have never before seen this sort of flashing gold on your face at such close quarters. Whatever can it mean?"

"It means that your inner vision is developing," she said with a beaming smile, "and when this power will further increase, new and vivid worlds will open before your eyes. This is only the beginning, the outer fringe, as Sri Aurobindo wrote to you the other day when you started seeing these colours everywhere round you, which he advised you to develop.<sup>1</sup>

"If you had acquired more of these powers of vision",

<sup>1</sup> "Develop this power of the inner sense and all that it brings you," wrote Sri Aurobindo to me in February, 1932. "These first seeings are only an outer fringe....behind lie whole worlds of experience which fill what seems to the natural man the gap (your Russell's 'inner void') between the earth-consciousness and the Eternal Infinite."

she went on, "you would have been delighted to see—what I saw the other day while meditating with you—how beautifully certain lovely colours were organising themselves within you—symbolical of the flowering of your inner creative powers—I feel interested also in the results, for example, to observe how the musical atmosphere is gradually concentrating round all the participants—to notice how the first amateurish feeling among the *sadhakas*, too, is vanishing, gradually.

"And I wanted it all to shape precisely like that, as you know," she continued. "I want you to create music in our Ashram the like of which one will not find anywhere else. I don't care to have music here to please a few people who have nothing to do or are easily satisfied."

"With your blessings, Mother, it will be like that, I am sure," I said in joy, "and I am so persuaded because now-a-days I often feel the bubbling of such a new power in me when I sing and compose—such new turns of melodies seem to drop from above like manna as it were—that I keep telling myself that it must be all due to the Guru's grace. Only," I added, "I feel a deep diffidence overtaking me almost simultaneously.... I do not know how to express it....but you know it all...."

"Go on," she said, without helping me out.

I did not know how to express it. I groped for it for a few seconds, then said: "You know all, Mother, so what's the use of my telling you that my chief obstacle is in the mental and not in the vital."

"I know," she nodded, but said no more.



So I had nothing for it but to go on.

"What I mean," I said, "or rather, what I feel is that the vital, whatever its faults, is entirely willing to submit, but not the mental, which wants to understand, to question, to weigh the pros and cons—as though without such deep precautions convictions were neither attainable nor worth having. But to do it justice, it does not yet know *how* to win to simple faith. The evidences of the hostile powers leave it only an aftermath of doubts—the testimony of the senses against there being a beneficent Deity ruling the world proves too strong for it. No wonder it finds it so hard to see things clearly in all this self-created blur. Or perhaps, as I sometimes infer from my recalcitrance to the higher Light, I have no native capacity for spiritual experience, no congenital power of vision which can glimpse Grace even in this world of awful wars and petty preoccupations."

She shook her head.

"But you *have* the vision," she said. "And you have had evidences galore of the reality of the Divine Grace. Only you do not yet know how to appraise the one and recognise the other."

"I see what you mean, Mother," I answered, dubiously. "You wrote to me the other day that what I call 'human at its best' is synonymous really with the Divine, so that, boiled down, it comes only to quibbling about terminology or vocabulary—isn't that what you meant? This much I see. But tell me: am I wrong in assuming that the Divine must be a reality of such an alchemic power that, once seen, His power can transmute all our doubts into



faith? Tell me, is this preconception of mine true or untrue?"

"Quite true."

"Well then, that is what I want to see, which I don't yet. But Sri Aurobindo writes that if I want to see the Divine in the human being I can see Him; if not, I can only see the human. I cannot understand this fully. For take my own case: Not only do I *want* to see the Divine in the human Guru, but I want it first and last. There are my friends who raise hell when they are asked or even expected to believe in a Personal God. There are others who cannot admit a God, or admit grudgingly a formless Presence. There are yet others who will have nothing to do with Guruvada or Avatarvada. But these difficulties I can simply ignore. Ever since I was thirteen I have wept—actually shed tears—praying to see the Divine in the human being, the human form. My friends used to call Sri Ramakrishna only a great man, nothing more; but I could never think of him as anything short of an Avatar. What always moved me so powerfully was a saying of the Gopis who, when offered *Brahmajnana* by Sri Krishna, declined with thanks, saying: 'What have we to do with the All-pervasive Formless and Knowledge of *It*, when we have *you* in our midst?' Of all the religions I feel the most powerful kinship with the Vaishnava outlook because of its emphasis on *Naralila*—the Human Incarnation. To see the Divine in the human is, I agree, the summit vision—for me, anyway; so that not only do I want to see the Divine in you and Sri Aurobindo but *I want nothing more*

ardently. Yet the fact remains that I have *not* seen. I see your kindness, grace, generosity, your inexhaustible patience, unquestioned wisdom, power of work, skill of organisation etc. But I do not find that enough: I want to see in you the Divine—the throbbing, the indubitable, the dazzling Divine. Here too, surely, it cannot be just a matter of terminology, since I want to see in you, I repeat, such an outburst of Divinity which, once seen, would cut all the knots of my heart and resolve all my doubts—*bhidyante hridaya-granthih chhidyante sarva samsayah*. But unhappily, I have not seen that—as yet. Evidently. For my doubts persist, you see. Now, tell me once for all: is this too due to a mere confusion of terms or quibbling about words?”

Mother held my eyes for a few seconds in silence, then smiled. “Listen”, she said at last, in her half-musing dreamy way which I always found so beautiful. “Anything that makes life exalting, anything that lifts you up above the lowest type of living in a mere animal harmony, anything that is great, noble, self-sacrificing, self-giving, inspiring, beautiful, is a missionary of the Divine. What I mean is: had it not been for the coming down of the Divine and His touching our souls with His higher attributes, there could have been no evolution from the lesser to the greater. In other words, life would have stayed utterly drab and dismal if the Divine had not come and touched some part at least of our leaden hearts into gold. So I repeat that whenever you see anything truly great, elevating or heart-warming, you *are* seeing the Divine without knowing it.

Only you call it 'human in the noblest sense'—that is the root of confusion. Once you wrote to Sri Aurobindo that you simply love artists like Tagore and atheists like Russell or Sarat Chatterjee, because they depict beautiful things and stand up for noble values. But if and when they do that, they *are* standing up for the Divine values without knowing it. Do you see my point?"

"I do, Mother," I answered. "Only, I am afraid, it leaves the central problem no nearer solution. For if, say, our Tagores and Russells and Sarat Chatterjees had really seen the Divine in the course of their noble quests—through humanitarianism and art and science—would they have just stopped where they did? I mean to ask: would they have remained—unlike Sri Krishna, Chaitanya, Buddha, Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo—as unhappy and unenlightened as they are? Why are they thoroughly shaken by the shocks of life, why does the spectacle of life afflict them with sheer despair? In a word, why are they so limited? Evidently because there is a deeper, more intimate, more pervading experience of the Divine possible which has not yet fallen to their lot in the course of their seekings and proddings. Is it not so?"

"Quite", she answered. "But that is just where Yoga comes in. For Yoga is, in effect, a high-pitched endeavour to catch and retain what the Tagores and Russells and Sarat Chatterjees may at best glimpse fugitively but cannot hold, far less possess. I have often said that the Divine visits us in the midst of our self-regarding petty pursuits and clamourings inspired by greed and the darkness of



our wrong movements like a breath of wind—an exhilarating mountain-whiff which touches you, enraptures you but then passes on. You run after it, but the breeze is no more. It is that which leaves people brooding and mourning. You say you haven't glimpsed the Divine. You have, in your brightest and purest moments. But only a glimpse—a touch of the breeze. You have run after it, but could not overtake it."

"My heart agrees partly, Mother," I said. "But you will pardon me if I demur that my having had a glimpse does not lessen my gloom that follows when I forfeit it the next moment; it only deepens my despair. For those who have never had such a glimpse have this advantage over such as we that, having never seen even fugitively what we have, they stay more or less contentedly tethered to their inferior pleasures. But not we, whose nostalgia has been aroused by the vision to which we have thrilled in eager wonder—because we are left with no clue to the problem of how to make it abide. That is why we, humans, can ill afford to do without an assurance that what is wafted to us like an elusive aroma on nameless wings and seems too lovely to be true, is none the less attainable by us, feckless creatures, in spite of appearances, as said, for instance, the beautiful exhortation of A.E.:

The unattainable beauty  
The thought of which was pain  
That flickered in eyes and lips



And vanished again:  
That fugitive beauty  
Thou shalt attain."

"Quite," she acquiesced. "And that is why Yoga has to be practised, I repeat. For Yoga is, in essence, nothing but the method and the process by which you grow to the unattainable and realise permanently the Eternal by and through what seems to be fugitive. In other words, there is a way of inducing the incredible, the elusive Unattainable—the Divine Light and Love and Truth—to accept our hospitality, to come to *stay* as our guests. Yoga shows you the way. You love a woman, a friend, an idol—but though the first taste of love sends you into raptures, you find these petering out, leaving you only an aftermath of drabness, of disillusionment. Why does this happen again and again? Because the person you love is not divinised. You grasp at fire but hug smoke and ashes. Your friend betrays selfishness, your beloved possessiveness, your idol feet of clay. Why? Because in them the Divine is assorted with the human. It is to reach to and realise permanently the essence of divinity in love and affection and life that we are here. You must claim the fire but reject the ashes, win the light but stave off the heat, welcome affection but cast away selfishness, invite joy but shut out pain and boredom. To sum up, to extract the pure gold purged of the dross that clings to it obstinately must be your one aspiration, your one *sadhana*."

"For that," she continued, "the first thing is to recognise the Divine in the best values, to see Him in everything that exalts, to be conscious—progressively and on every plane of your being—of the movements which lead to confusion or the mixture by acquiring the power to discriminate unerringly between what is to be cherished and what is to be abolished. That is why I wrote to you that to start with, you must, once and for all, get rid of this confusion between the human and the Divine and remember that the Divine cannot fail you if you are utterly sincere and want Him above everything else." She gave me an abstracted smile and then went on: "And so far as you are concerned, the very fact that you can love so spontaneously shows that the Divine is more in you than in many another who cannot love or feel for others. The very fact that you are stirred so much by the loftiest sentiments whether of poets like Tagore or atheists like Russell or great Yogis like Sri Ramakrishna shows that the Divine values move you to your depths, no matter who advocates them. Never mind what the atheists or the artists say when they claim that they love the human. For their loves and ideas at their purest and loftiest *are* Divine in essence."

Years later I was reminded of this when I was reading the famous hymn of Akrur to Krishna:

As all the rivers run to meet the sea,  
Though some run straight and others deviously,

So all who worship what their hearts adore  
Unwittingly, Lord, sail for thine one Shore.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sarva eva yajanti twam Sarvadeva-Maheshwaram  
Ye pyanyadevatabhakta yadyapyanyadhiyah Prabho  
Yathadriprabava nadyah parjanya-puritam prabho  
Vishanthi sarvatah Sindhum tadvat twam gatayontatah.

The Bhagavat. 10. 10.

## CHAPTER XV

### TRUE HUMILITY

I HAVE quoted in the preceding chapter a letter Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me vindicating the attitude of a seer which might well look like self-superiority to others. But appearances are not always a reliable guide to reality. For instance, many may call over-assertive his answer to a gibe of mine (I had asked whether the Supramental could really be true? Did it not look very much like a juggler whose legerdemain left us eventually high and dry in the land of nowhere?):

“There is no question of jugglery about it. What is not true is not Supramental. As for calm and silence, there is no need of the Supramental to get that. One gets it even on the level of the Higher Mind which is the next, above the human intelligence. I got these things in 1908 twenty-seven years ago, and I can assure you they were solid and marvellous enough in all conscience without any need of Supramentality to make them more so. Again, ‘a calm that looks like action and behaves like motion’ is a phenomenon of which I know nothing. A calm or silence, that is what I have had—the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for four months and wrote six volumes of the *Arya*, not



to speak of all the letters, messages et cetera I have written since. If you say that writing is not an action or motion but only something that seems like it—a jugglery of the consciousness—well, still out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity and have also taken my share in keeping up an Ashram which has at least an appearance to the physical senses of being solid and material! If you deny that these things are material or solid (which, of course, metaphysically you can) then you land yourself plump into Shankara's Illusionism, and there I will leave you."

Or let us take his statement: "My experience is not limited to a radiant peace. I know very well what ecstasy and *ananda* are from the *Brahmananda* down to the *sharira ananda* (physical bliss) and I can experience them at any time. But of these things I prefer to speak only when my work is done—for it is in a transformed consciousness here and not only above where the *ananda* always exists that I seek their base of permanence."

Or his rejoinder to my charge about his readiness to answer mental questions while denying the mind even a *Lebensraum* in God's good earth:

"But I do not understand how all that can prevent me from answering mental questions. On my own showing, if it is necessary for the Divine purpose it has to be done, Sri Ramakrishna himself answered thousands of questions, I believe. But the answers must be such as he gave and such as I try to answer from a higher spiritual experience, from a deeper source of knowledge and not lucubrations

of the logical intellect trying to co-ordinate its ignorance; still less can there be a placing of the Divine truth before the judgment of the intellect to be condemned or acquitted by that authority—for the authority here has not sufficient jurisdiction or competence.”

Now, such statements when torn out of their context might well be misunderstood by the reader who, arguing from his lesser platform, might well dismiss the vista that opens on a higher as chimerical or unreal. Some others might even go farther and hold all such claims as pretentious inasmuch as they lack the neat flawlessness of commendable humility.

But I submit that such deductions will all be wrong and so will scarcely touch Sri Aurobindo. For he was nothing if not humble to the point of shyness. I know it is presumptuous on the part of a disciple to appear to certify the humility of his Guru, but as my main object has been to reminisce about him, I may venture to speak simply about his simplicity and humbly about his humility, even though here too, those who have never known a real Guru are, I fear, unlikely to appreciate the full import of what I am going to say.

It happened about twenty years ago. The Mother used to come to my room every Sunday and answer our questions which were taken down by an American *sadhika* who was an expert stenographer. One day somebody asked her a question about the value of humility, whereupon I said ironically that it was a rare virtue. Mother smiled and nodded. “Yes” she said, “and even rarer than one believes.

I have known only one person here who can be called perfectly humble."

And were we not intrigued? "Who can it be?" was the unspoken question which visited each of us who hoped against hope...like the holder of a Derby ticket... but alas, she disappointed us all with an impeccable impartiality when she revealed that it was no other than Sri Aurobindo himself.

Just a chance remark, but it wrought an important change in my outlook on qualities like modesty and humility, for it helped me realise how far removed was the common brand of modesty from authentic humility when I contrasted the genteel veneer of the former with the pure white but essentially soothing glow of the latter. In other words, I began to read something new into Sri Aurobindo's letters so sincere in their simplicity as well as spontaneous in their outspokenness. It was just an unadorned statement of his viewpoint and vision, naturally confidential in its very nature—since he was always averse to self-advertisement—but utterly confident that his recipient would take it as such. In this he was often, alas, let down by many of us, but nothing could vitiate the virgin simplicity that spouted out from his soul like natural spring-water—beneficent, crystalline and uncontaminated by anything that could be deleterious to those who drank deep at its pure fount. I will give an instance or two to make my meaning clear.

I wrote to him once when some of his disciples in the Ashram praised his gravity to the skies (which I took to be a



frontal attack on my own "vital cheerfulness" as they called it) that I doubted whether the dehumanised psychic gravity which he sponsored could ever be as warm and living as the vital *joie de vivre*—and so on. (I invariably attacked what he called the "psychic" and ended by calling the Supramental suspect—whenever somebody or other nagged at my social light-heartedness.) To that he wrote back: "Something else in you was inclined to see as the only alternative some hard grim ascetic ideal, the blank featureless Brahman and imagined that the Supramental was that; something in the vital looked on the conquest of wrong movements as a hard desperate *tapasaya*, not as a passage into the purity and joy of the Divine,—even now something in you seems to insist on regarding the psychic attitude as something extraordinary, difficult, unhuman and impossible! There were these and other lingerings of the mind and the vital; you have to clear them out and look at the simplicity of the Truth with a straight and simple gaze. The Russellian fear of emptiness is the form the active mind gives to Silence. Yet it was on what you call emptiness, on the Silence that my whole Yoga was founded and it was through it that there came afterwards all the inexhaustible riches of a greater Knowledge, Will and Joy, all the experiences of greater mental, psychic and vital realms, all the ranges up to Overmind and beyond. *The cup has often to be emptied before it can be new-filled*; the Yogin, the *sadhaka* ought not to be afraid of emptiness or silence. It is not that there is anything peculiar to you in these difficulties; every *sadhaka* entering the way has to



get over similar impediments. It took me four years of inner striving to find a real way, even though the Divine help was with me all the time, and even then it seemed to come by an accident; and it took me ten years more of intense Yoga under a supreme inner guidance to find *the* Way and that was because I had my past and the world's past to assimilate and overpass before I could find and found the future."

But the old Adam in me was not to be appeased so easily in those days—the early thirties. So I wrote back to him:

"O Guru,

You do disconcert country innocents like us even as Krishna did *his* contemporaries with *his vyamishrani vakyani* (contradictory statements). For in one mood you say that the Divine must answer all sincere aspirations and then, in the very next, bewilder us by your enigmatic statement that even the 'Divine help' seemed to come to you by an 'accident'. But at least do have a little commiseration for the human in me who longs to take you at your word if only you will be so kind as not to make it too impossible. And also how can we get on with this Divine of yours if even His help on which so much eloquence has been spent down the ages has to be waited for in stupefied passivity since it can only come 'by an accident'?"

Imperturbable as ever, he wrote back:

"I think you have made too much play with my phrase 'an accident', ignoring the important qualification, 'it *seemed* to come by an accident'. After four years of *pranayam* and other practices on my own, with no other result

than an increased health and energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a *bhakta* with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power. We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he had never intended—for they were Advaitic and Vedantic and he was against Advaita Vedanta—and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will—a principle or rather a seed force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or style or dogma or *shastra* to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the Devil that had got hold of me. Does not all that justify my phrase

‘it seemed to come to me like an accident?’ But my meaning is that the ways of the Divine are not like that of humans or in accord with our patterns so that it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for him what he shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we do. If we admit the Divine at all, then the true reason and *bhakti* seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. I do not see how without them there can be *avyabhicharini bhakti* (one-pointed adoration).”

With time this spontaneous self-revealing became almost habitual with him, and along with it his friendly argumentativeness with me, so much so that he almost seemed like taking my cussedness seriously as it were. Not that he did not know or that there were any *lacunae* in his understanding of our human nature. He knew very well how oddly it acted especially when it was, as it had to be, lured off the track by its perverse moods. He came down to us merely because he had felt a simple impulse of generosity guided by his profound wisdom. To give a really convincing instance, he wrote a long letter which moved me deeply because I had carped at what I called his fundamental incapacity to understand the mentality of the average man as against those who are spiritual giants like himself. That is why, I had whimpered, he always went on talking so glibly about rejecting all doubts or treading the pure sunlit path. As I went on, I gathered further momentum till I broke out into a passionate indictment: “You write calmly, Guru, that we have only to withdraw from all egoistic movements—whereupon I can but smile sadly. For you seem



to assure us placidly that we can't get rid of the tyranny of pain because we won't—being in love, congenitally, with the drama which the tyrant brings in its wake. Such statements do baffle me! For if what you say was true, it would follow (would it not?) that all suffering must be a make-believe, a *maya*, since we like it so much?—ergo, why not welcome it sportingly, taking it all as a joke? That is why I often wonder whether the Supramental consciousness of your ideal stratospheres can ever truly enter into the world of fact of us, mental humans! For I can tell you that we—common mortals, constituted as we are—resist nothing as stubbornly as suffering and agony, self-pity, and despair. For I have noted, times out of number, that my mind experiences only a deep discomfort to see anybody suffer or groan or writhe in agony. How can I then help wondering whether your ascending peak of Yogic consciousness has not made you somewhat aloof, perforce, from what really happens down in our plains of blood and sweat and tears? And then it is not just for the fun of doubt either. For diagnose as you will, I defy you to convince me that I derive any real pleasure in heckling you at every turn—you whose message made me cut away from my dearest moorings and plunge for the unknown! It is only because I find your prescription too outlandish that I have to bandy words with you even when I know, alas, that I cannot possibly cope with your intellectual arguments! But, Guru, what do you come to gain by winning in the lists of wordy arguments? For have you not yourself said again and again that arguments, however weighty, can never do duty for Yogic joy



and peace and love—the goods we came for, trusting that you would be able to deliver them if only we followed your lead. But then—and here is the crux of the problem—how can a human, being human, follow such an utterly divine lead as yours so disconcertingly alien to reason and far from feasible, besides? there is a saying in English that you can catch a swallow if you put salt on its tail. You seem to prescribe similarly: ‘detach yourself, don’t lend your ears to hostile suggestions, open yourself and go on doing it all the time sleeplessly till, one fine morning, you will find your ships simply haled into the harbour of bliss beyond the dark storms!’ But how to detach oneself, how to open oneself—how to think only the right thoughts? We ask such questions again and again—only to receive the same answers, everlastingly! Well, Guru, there you have in a nutshell my difficulty, or rather the typical impasse of an average aspirant. But you seem very much like those great doctors who go to a pauper and prescribe remedies for him which only a prince can procure. No wonder we do not recover from our ailments—have little progress to show, alas!”

After despatching the letter I felt even worse—more depressed than ever which, in its turn, made me fear that this time he might be forced, at last, to dismiss me; for hadn’t I transgressed the limit and invited dismissal by my virtual refusal to recognise him even as a competent Guide, not to mention a God-realised Guru? But there again he came out once more, unperturbed, with his balm of sympathy which only a truly humble Guru could offer to one who had failed him utterly and deliberately.

"I never said," he wrote back, "that to overcome doubts was easy, it is difficult because it is the nature of something in the human physical mind to cling to doubt for its own sake. It is not easy to overcome gloom, depression, grief and suffering because something in the human vital clings to it and almost needs it as part of the drama of life. So also I have never said it was not difficult because they were ingrained in the human vital and even if thrown out were always being brought back into it either by its own habit or by the invasion of the general Nature and the resurgence of its old response. Your idea that my difficulties were different from those of human nature is a mental construction or inference without any real basis. If I were ignorant of human difficulties and therefore intolerant of them how is it that I am so patient with them as you cannot deny that I am? Why for years do I go on patiently arguing with your doubts, spending so much of my time, always trying to throw light on your difficulties, to show how things stand, to give reasons for a knowledge gained by long and indisputable experience? Am I writing these letters to you every night because I have no sympathy with you in your doubts and difficulties? Why do I tolerate and help and write soothing and encouraging letters to these women who break out into hunger-strike and threaten suicide once a fortnight? Why do we bear all this trouble and *tracas* and *fracas* and resistance and obloquy and hard criticism from the *sadhakas*, why were we so patient with men like B and H and others if we had no understanding and no sympathy with the difficulties of human nature? Is it because I press

always for faith and discourage doubt as a means of approach to the spiritual realisation? But what spiritual guide with a respect for truth could do otherwise?"

Then with my regard to his diagnoses and prescription about pain he went on to argue with me once again for the hundredth time:

"As to the statement about drama and something in you liking to suffer, nobody doubts that your external consciousness dislikes suffering. The physical mind and consciousness of man hates its own suffering and, if left to itself, dislikes also to see others suffer. But if you will try to fathom the significance of your own admission of liking drama or of the turn towards drama—from which very few human beings escape—and if you go deep enough, you will find that there is something in the vital which likes suffering and clings to it for the sake of the drama. It is something below the surface, but it is strong, almost universal in human nature and difficult to eradicate unless one recognises it and gets inwardly away from it. The mind and the physical of man do not like suffering, for if they did it would not be suffering any longer, but this thing in the vital wants it in order to give spice to life. It is the reason why constant depressions can go on returning and returning even though the mind longs to get rid of them, because this in the vital responds and goes on repeating the same movement like a gramophone as soon as it is got going and insists on turning the whole round of the oft-repeated record. It does not really depend on the reasons which the vital gives for starting off to the round, these are often of



the most trivial character and wholly insufficient to justify it. It is only by a strong will to detach oneself, not to reject, not to welcome, that one can get rid of this most troublesome and dangerous streak in human nature. When, therefore, we speak of the vital comedy, of the vital drama we are speaking from a psychological knowledge which does not end with the surface of things but looks at these hidden movements—it is impossible to deal with things for the purpose of Yoga if we confine ourselves to the surface consciousness only. It is also according to the rule of these reactions that your despondence should have come immediately after considerable progress in *bhakti* and the will to surrender in the inner being—for it comes from the spirit of darkness which attacks the *sadhaka* whenever it can and that spirit resents fiercely all progress made and hates the very idea of progress and its whole policy is to convince him by his attacks and suggestions that he has made none or that what progress he has made is after all null and inconclusive."

To drive my charge home I had in my letter referred to the failure of his superhuman prescription with a gifted human whom I will call Mr. Philo (abbreviated from Philosopher) who had to be sent away from the Ashram because he refused to give up drink. What about his views, I asked, about God himself being as much bound by his own laws as his creatures by their own karma?

"As to Philo," Gurudev answered, in the same letter, "the Mother and I have always thought poorly of his thinking mind: he was never able to understand with the



mind anything but the orthodox Adwaitic ideas in their most general and popular form. As for his idea of the Divine being bound, being a hostage to law as much as Philo himself or his cat, that was an old pet idea of his... an idea that can be accepted only by those who are unable to think philosophically or make the necessary spiritual distinctions. The laws of this world as it is are the laws of the Ignorance and the Divine in the world maintains them so long as there is the Ignorance; if he did not, the universe would crumble to pieces—*utsideyur ime lokah*, as the Gita puts it. There are also, very naturally, conditions for getting out of the Ignorance into the Light. One of them is that the mind of the *sadhaka* should co-operate with the Truth and that his will should co-operate with the Divine Power which, however slow its action may seem to the vital or to the physical mind, is uplifting the nature towards the Light. When that co-operation is complete the progress can be rapid enough; but the *sadhaka* should not grudge the time and the labour needed to make that co-operation fully possible to the blindness and weakness of human nature and effective.

"All this call of yours for faith, sincerity, surrender is only an invitation to make that co-operation more easily possible. If the physical mind ceases to judge all things including those that it does not yet know or are beyond it, like the deeper things of the spirit, then it becomes easier for it to receive the Light and know by illumination and experience the things that it does not yet know. If the mental and vital will place themselves in the Divine

Hand without reservation, then it becomes easier for the Power to work and produce tangible effects. If there is resistance, then it is natural that it should take more time and the work should be done from within or, as it might appear, underground, so as to prepare the nature and undermine the resistance. Read the letter of your friend Professor Mohinimohan on Yoga and the spiritual life. Beautifully idealistic, but it does not make allowance for the hard struggle of the spiritual emergence and leaps to fulfilment with too radiant and ethereal a sweep."

"Struggle for spiritual emergence,"—the phrase has indeed often recurred to me in my dark hours of stress and tension, but perhaps never with the same revealing force as when I learnt my first deep lesson in spiritual humility. The occasion, the context of my humiliation, will stand out as a landmark in the history of my Yogic evolution in retrospect. I may as well relate it here as the experience did border on the miraculous and I have witnessed very few miracles uptil now.<sup>1</sup>

It happened in May, 1936. I had been in the Ashram since November, 1928, and now longed to go out for a while to seek a little respite from my exhausting wrestles with my ego. But it hurt my pride to be forced to go out for a temporary relief. I wanted to achieve something durable before seeking diversion. I knew that the only way to achieve anything worth while was to surrender one's

<sup>1</sup> Postscript. That is, till the end of 1950, for in 1951-52 I saw many a miracle, day after marvellous day.

self-will to the Guru's will. But I wished to dismiss this knowledge as hearsay. "What nonsense!" rebuked my mental vital. "What you need is a strong tonic—a bout of heart-warming, virile *sadhana*: in other words, *doing it*. But this surrender of yours is a myth—synonymous with *undoing it*, and your resignation is a mere camouflage, a respectable name for indolence. Remember the Upanishad's exhortation: '*Nayam atma valahinena labhyah.*' (None but the strong wins to the Kingdom of the soul!)"

Not that I was unaware in my heart of hearts that I was merely temporising with something suspect—to put off the inevitable, that in the end I would have to surrender my self-will. But the more I ached to surrender the less I favoured the prospect. Was there no other way—I asked myself in sheer agony till, desperately, I decided on the alternative: the path of *tapasya*. If I persevere, the Divine is bound to respond, so why must I kotow to a will other than my own? I questioned the very basis of *Guruvada* as unmitigated authoritarianism. No wonder my untamed vital jumped to exploit the convenient sophism. "No more bowing," it roared, "to what is imposed from without: the only deity is the Resident within—Him alone worship, '*break all other idols*.'" Thus I borrowed the great Vivekananda's *mantra* without stopping to ask myself whether or not I was not built in his heroic mould! "To tread the austere path, the manly path!"—I goaded my drooping spirits in order to be a master in my own house. No more petitioning to Gurudev and Mother in lack-lustre self-pity, I must rise to the occasion and rely on myself alone. I



withdrew from all social pleasures and went into a heroic seclusion increasing, day after barren day, my hours of meditation and prayer to the exclusion even of reading and writing. This was the most difficult of all feats, but the more difficult I found it the less I liked to scotch the project, the more I was coaxed by Gurudev to take the sunlit path of the psychic the more I repeated to myself a Sanskrit couplet which said:

Rely on thine own strength and grinding thy teeth  
Defy with heroic deeds the Tyrant, Fate.<sup>1</sup>

So in the end I decided not even to apprise Gurudev of my grim resolve of chalking out my path "alone, unfriended" if not "melancholy, slow."

But alas, "Krishna," say the Rishis, "assays you by your attitude, not deeds." Neither is God mocked. So the more I shut myself in, vowed to plucking the stars from on high by dint of my Herculean *japa* and meditation, the more receded from me all joy of life and zest for *sadhana* till I found myself groping in a veritable catacomb as it were. Life seemed dismal beyond endurance and I did not know where to turn now, having ruled out the Guru's help as hearsay. But it was not even the gloom that mortified me most, but its stark irrelevance in the context of my ardour and aspiration. I could neither understand why my heroic

<sup>1</sup> "Param pourusham ashritya dantair dantan vichurnayan  
Shubhenashubhamudyuktam praktanam pourusham jayet."

"*Bhavagrahi Janardana*"—Janardana is a name of Krishna.



attempt to soar should have been rewarded by clipped wings nor explain how a march forward towards the east should have pushed me back to the sunset of the last gleam of hope. I had plumed myself all along on my intelligence and energy and yet here was I in the grip of a gloom I could neither account for nor know how to deal with. Did I not "grind my teeth" hard enough? Why then did I fail so ignominiously in wresting the laurels from the hand of the tyrant, Fate? The hopelessness of it all brought me only humiliation but I found no way out now that I had whisked Gurudev off my programme. So there was nothing for it but to grind my teeth harder still, but the more I persisted the less I succeeded in penetrating the mystery of my dire pain which only deepened till—it happened! What it was let the good reader judge from the correspondence which passed between him and me.

"O Guru," I wrote after giving him a full history of all that I had gone through riding on my folly, "I wanted to achieve it all by my unaided efforts and meditated and concentrated as never before, for days and days. But the more I persevered, the deeper grew the gloom and the mental agony till, last evening, when I was utterly cut off from light and felt like one completely stranded, I prayed, in tears, upon my lonely terrace. 'O Krishna,' I said, 'you know I have wanted only you all my life, or at least aspired to want nothing but your Grace. You know also that I decided of late to arrive through *tapasya* because I was told that you never let a sincere prayer go unheeded. And yet how is it that the more I sue you the more you melt

away like a shadow form to the eager clutch? I do not understand your *lila*, Lord, but have mercy on one who is at the end of his tether! I own at last that my much-vaunted intelligence cannot find a key to the enigma. I have only learnt one thing: that there is no ignominy in not understanding it all and that the true understanding can come only when one realises that one is completely impotent by oneself. In any event, I appeal to you in this deep impasse to respond to me—give me a sign that you are not a chimera.'

"O Guru, as soon as this prayer issued from my heart of humility, I experienced a velvety softness within and a feeling of ineffable plasticity which rapidly grew into something so concrete that I felt almost as if I could *touch* it with my fingers! But even this was not all. As soon as my pride admitted defeat all my piled-up gloom of despair and frustration vanished as though by magic: my restlessness was redeemed by peace and my darkness by a radiance which seemed too incredible to be true and yet too vivid to be dismissed as wishful thinking. And to me it seemed so utterly convincing because it seemed to descend, like an avalanche, from nowhere—to sweep me off my feet when I had least expected it. Kanai congratulates me and insists that I have a real and important *psychic experience* without knowing it. What have you to say thereto, Guru? To think that even I could have an experience and a psychic one at that!"—and so on.

His reply came, duly, the next morning.

"It was certainly an experience," he wrote, "and as

Kanai very accurately described it, an experience of great value: a psychic experience *par excellence*. A feeling of 'velvety softness' and an 'ineffable plasticity within,' is a psychic experience and can be nothing else. It means a modification of the substance of the consciousness especially in the vital emotional part, and such a modification prolonged or repeated till it became permanent would mean a great step in what I call the psychic transformation of the being. It is just these modifications in the inner substance that make transformation possible. Further, it was a modification that made a beginning of knowledge possible—for by knowledge in Yoga we mean not thought or ideas about spiritual things but psychic understanding from within and spiritual illumination from above. Therefore the first result was this feeling of yours that '*there was no ignominy in not understanding it all and that the true understanding could come only when one realised that one was completely impotent by oneself.*' This was itself a beginning of a true understanding: a psychic understanding—something felt within which sheds a light or brings up a spiritual truth that mere thinking would not have given, also a truth that is effective, bringing both the enlightenment and solace you needed, for what the psychic being brings with it always is light and happiness, an inner understanding and relief and solace.

"Another very promising aspect of this experience is that it came as an immediate response to an appeal to the Divine. You asked for the understanding and the way out and at once Krishna showed you both: the way out



was the change of the consciousness within, the plasticity which makes the knowledge possible and also the understanding of the condition of mind and vital in which the true knowledge or power of knowledge could come. For the inner knowledge comes from within and above (whether from the Divine in the heart or from the Self above) and for it to come the pride of the mind and vital in the surface mental ideas and their insistence on them must go. One must know that one is ignorant before one can begin to know. This shows that I am not wrong in pressing for the psychic opening as the only way out. For as the psychic opens, such responses and much more also become common and the inner change also proceeds by which they are made possible."

Upon this I wrote to him once again asking whether a "feeling" could be called an "experience". Was not a mere feeling something too adventitious and subjective to be able to claim the status of an "experience"? To this he replied promptly at once.

"I doubt," he wrote, "whether I am able to answer your question or whether even I quite understand it. There is no law that a feeling cannot be an experience. Experiences are of all kinds and take all forms in the consciousness. When the consciousness undergoes, sees or feels anything spiritual or psychic or even occult, that is an experience (in the technical Yogic sense), for there are of course all sorts of experiences which are not of that character. The feelings themselves are of many kinds. The word 'feeling' is often used for an emotion, and there can be



psychic or spiritual emotions which are numbered among Yogic experiences, such as a wave of pure *bhakti* or the rising of love towards the Divine. A feeling also means a perception of something felt—a perception in the vital or psychic or in the essential substance of the consciousness. I find, even often, a mental perception, when it is very vivid, described as a feeling. If you exclude all these feelings and kindred ones and say that they are feelings and not experiences, then you leave very little room for experiences.

“Feeling and vision are the main forms of spiritual experience. One sees and feels the Brahman everywhere; one feels a force enter or go out from one; one feels or sees the descent of Light; one feels the descent of peace or *ananda*. Kick all that on the ground that it is but a feeling, not an experience (what the deuce then *is* an experience?) and you make a clean sweep of most of the things that we call experience. Again, we feel a change in the substance of the consciousness or the state of consciousness. We feel ourselves spreading in wideness and the body only as a small thing in the wideness (this can be seen also). We feel the heart-consciousness being wide instead of narrow, soft instead of hard, illumined instead of obscure, the head consciousness also, the vital, even the physical; we feel thousands of things of all kinds and why are we not to call them experience? Of course it is an inner sight, an inner feeling, not material like the feeling of a cold wind, or a stone but as the inner consciousness deepens it is not less vivid or concrete, it is even more so.

“In this case what you felt was not an emotion—though

something emotional came with it—you felt a condition in the very substance of consciousness—a softness a plasticity, even a *velvety softness, an ineffable plasticity*. Any fellow who knows anything about Yoga would immediately say: What a fine experience—a very clear and spiritual and psychic experience!"

But, as Tagore used to say, and rightly, a boon can never be *given*, it has to be *won*, to wit, one has to be mature enough to assimilate it. So, for years to come, the "fine experience" was not repeated—possibly because the prayer of humility did not issue straight from the heart's core with anything like the same intensity. No wonder shadow fell on my path once more after the brief interlude of light, and the old anarchy of darkness and doubt resumed its sway till, sore and weary, I asked him, somewhat foolishly, whether the vicissitudes were imposed on me from without or by the Guru himself to keep his *lila* going. I complained also about his keeping silent when we wanted to be told of the working of occult forces. What on earth did he mean by

This earth alone is not our teacher and nurse,  
The powers of all the worlds have entrance here.<sup>1</sup>

He replied tenderly as ever:

"For me the path of Yoga has always been a battle as well as a journey, a thing of ups and downs, of light followed by darkness, followed by greater light, but nobody is better

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book II, Canto V

pleased than myself when a disciple can arrive out of all that to the smooth and clear path which the human physical mind quite rightly yearns after."

And then to pacify me further he went on to add:

"If I write about these questions from the Yogic point of view, even though on a logical basis, there is bound to be much that is in conflict with the current opinions, e.g., about miracles, the limits of judgments by sense-data etc. I have avoided as much as possible writing about these subjects because I would have to propound things that cannot be understood except by reference to data other than those of the physical senses or of reason founded on these alone. I might have to speak of the laws and forces not recognised by reason or physical science. In my public writings as well as my letters to *sadhakas* I have not dealt with these because they go out of the range of ordinary knowledge and the understanding founded on it. These things are known to some but they do not usually speak about it,<sup>1</sup> while the public view of much of those that are known is either credulous or incredulous, but in both cases without experience or knowledge. The Yogi arrives at a sort of division in his being in which the inner *Purusha*, fixed and calm, looks at the perturbations of the outer man as one looks at the passions of an unreasonable child; that once fixed, he can proceed afterwards to control the outer man also; but a complete control of the outer man

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Laotse's famous epigram:

The one who knows the Secret does not speak:

The one who speaks does not yet know the Secret.



needs a long and arduous *tapasaya*. But even from the *siddha* Yogi you cannot always expect a perfect perfection: there are many who do not even care for perfection of the outer nature which cannot be held as a disproof of their realisation and experience. If you so regard it, you have to rule out of court the greater number of Yogis of the past and the Rishis of the old time also.

"I own that the ideal of my Yoga is different, but I cannot bind by it other spiritual men and their achievements and discipline. My own ideal is transformation of the outer nature, perfection as perfect as it can be. But you cannot say that those who have not achieved it or do not care to achieve it had no spirituality. Beautiful conduct—not politeness which is an outer thing, however valuable—but beauty founded upon a spiritual realisation of unity and harmony projected into life, is certainly part of the perfect harmony."

Whenever I got restive he wrote to me in that vein—firm but not overassertive, sure of his vision yet unwilling to impose it, persuasive but never insistent. That was always *his* way of being humble.

But no letters that he has written to me all these years were as soft with humility as his three or four recent ones on sports. Here I must pause a little, as much to explain the context as to obviate a possible misundersanding on the part of the general reader. (With this end in view I may as well state, at the outset, that I bring in sports primarily to stress his humility which showed us, his disciples, how grievously *we* lacked it.)



Our Ashram, as I have already said, started under the aegis of silence. In point of fact, those who visited it, say, in the late twenties, are scarcely likely to recognise it any more than a child is likely to be recognised in the adult after a space of two or three decades. In the case of our Ashram, however, it is not time alone which is responsible for the momentous change, but athletics and sports, by and large. I have referred in an earlier chapter to new disciples coming in and being admitted along with their children. The latter, as they grew up had to be taken in hand, that is, given an education; so sports had to be introduced inclusive of games, general exercises and athletics and then—oh what a quandary I was in, overnight!

For me it was somewhat difficult—and embarrassing as well—to have to trace my personal reactions to the Ashram sports and athletics, the more because I had little excuse and even less justification for having chafed at them as I did, initially. But I must face up to it because otherwise I cannot fully bring out what I want to: Gurudev's humility and unassertiveness going hand in hand with his firm vindication of his own vision. So I shall have once again to go back for a little.

When the sports and athletics were first sponsored by the Mother and were being organised under her tireless personal supervision, I found myself, strangely, resenting their trespass into our peaceful Ashram. I say 'strangely' because temperamentally I have never cared much for the sedentary life and the passive kind of peace. Since my adolescence I have had a predilection for sports and games and athletics

in general. I do not claim that I had ever had any special aptitude for these things but I have always had a pronounced predilection for games like football and tennis and was fond even of exercises such as swimming, riding, dumb-bells, developers etc. I could never miss a good football or tennis match in Calcutta or Wimbledon. In India, as also in England, I used to play tennis regularly and not too badly. I liked billiards and loved chess passionately, in which I made my mark in England. I liked rowing, too, at Cambridge. The long and short of it is that I ought, if anything, to have rejoiced when Mother encouraged us to play and exhorted us to take exercise regularly,—in a word, literally drilled us into these with her peerless persuasiveness.

But what happened was just the reverse. From the very start I looked askance at these "frivolous goings on" as I called them and vowed myself never to join the sports—forgetting altogether that I was all these years doing regular exercise which so far had kept me in fine trim. But as I strongly approved of my own wry mood, I found plausible arguments enough against what I decided to castigate. In a sense it was disloyalty since I knew perfectly well that both Sri Aurobindo and Mother not only approved of sports but encouraged us all to profit by them. A beautiful quarterly magazine called *Bulletin of Physical Education* was started and printed in the Ashram in which Sri Aurobindo contributed article after article, a privilege no other magazine in India could claim—during his post-yogic period—except of course the *Arya* of which he himself

had been the editor. Also Mother herself wrote for the *Bulletin* regularly and, at considerable expense, had beautiful blocks made of the photographs of our boys and girls marching, playing, drilling or taking exercises. In the very first issue (February 1949) Sri Aurobindo wrote a fairly long article entitled "Message" in which he explained at great length "the deeper *raison d'être* of such associations and especially the need and utility for the nation of a widespread organization of such sports or physical exercises" as were sponsored by the Mother with all the emphasis of her strong personality. He dwelt also on the "national aspect" of the subject and was at great pains to explain and underline why "this strictness of training, this habit of discipline and obedience" could not be held to be "inconsistent with individual freedom" which he loved. He pointed out, cogently, that "in all kinds of concerted action" the habit of discipline created "the condition" not only for "the right use of liberty" but "even for its preservation and survival."

I cannot possibly give long excerpts from his luminous articles in the *Bulletins* and must refer those who are interested to a study of the same. What I am concerned with here is to emphasise the fact that he gave his support to the Mother wholeheartedly (as he wrote to me once) in her initiative in bringing in sports. But then had he not himself wanted all along to bring about a synthesis of the East and the West? And had I not read even before I came to the Ashram (In his essay, *Our Ideal*) "The message of the East to the West is a true message:



'Only by finding himself can man be saved', and 'what shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul?' The West has heard the message and is seeking out the law and truth of the soul and the evidences, of an inner reality greater than the material. The danger is that with her passion for mechanism and her exaggerated intellectuality she may fog herself in an external and false psychism, such as we see arising in England and America, the homes of the mechanical genius, or in intellectual, unspiritual and therefore erroneous theories of the Absolute, such as have run their course in critical and metaphysical Germany.

"The message the West brings to the East is a true message. Man also is God and it is through his developing manhood that he approaches the godhead; Life also is the Divine, its progressive expansion is the self-expression of the Brahman and to deny Life is to diminish the Godhead within us. This is the truth that returns to the East from the West translated into the language of the higher truth the East already possesses; and it is an ancient knowledge. The East also is waking to the message. The danger is that Asia may accept it in the European form, forget for a time her own law and nature and either copy blindly the West or make a disastrous amalgam of that which she has in its most inferior forms and the crudenesses which are invading her."

Moreover, did I not know full well that Sri Aurobindo had never been a traditionalist—never believed in "repeating the past," however glorious? Had he not written



in the very first chapter of his *Essays on the Gita*: "We of the coming day stand at the head of a new age of development which must lead to such a new and larger synthesis. We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins of any of the three schools or Tantrics or to adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the Gita. That would be to limit ourselves and to attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities. We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future."

To inspiring messages such as these, born of his unique and comprehensive world-vision, I had always responded with fervour which had helped me not a little in staying loyal to him in the darkest hours of my spiritual crises. In fact I took a genuine pride in asserting to my friends, with perfect truthfulness, that I revered him not less for his iconoclasm (by which I mean his debunking of unilluminated faith and dead ritualism which are so often mistaken by traditionalists as of the essence of religion) than for his deep reverence for the highest legacies and revelations of the past both of the East and the West, which had caused him to prophesy: "All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis; a fresh and widely embracing harmonisation of our gains is both an intellectual and a spiritual necessity of the future".<sup>1</sup> Also, had I

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Gita*—Chapter I

not lectured often enough to large audiences that it was of the happiest augury that we lived under the aegis of two such rare spirits of the East and West who were out to show the way to a New Orientation, culminating in a new synthesis, which alone could bring us effectively out of the global darkness? And yet, alas! here was I stumbling grievously once again, a pitiful puppet in the hands of the hostile forces whose business has always been to cajole us somehow out of the ambit of Light back into the penumbra of Ignorance. In other words, I tripped, not because I did not know but because I would not see. That is why, in the matter of sports, I could recant so unthinkingly all that I had sworn by in the past, and then—as one gathers momentum when one speeds downward—went on to complain to Gurudev against the Mother herself to whom I had owed so much all through and who had never once been unkind to me. But the most curious part of it was that, although I was partly conscious of playing a kind of comedy, I felt like one who is suddenly half-obsessed and so *has* to say things of which he is, secretly, a little ashamed. Otherwise how could I have possibly gone on writing to Sri Aurobindo long letters against the Mother who was graciousness itself, accusing her of being a martinet and a disciplinarian, too Western in her outlook to be able to appreciate the millennial wisdom of India, when I knew, all the time, that she loved India as she loved no other country in the world?

I had indeed complained against the Mother many a time in the past but I do not think that I had ever attacked

her so bitterly and defiantly tuning myself into a heroic pitch and flaunting a mood which nevertheless my heart intermittently suspected as being of the nature of a tragic-comedy. I say this now as I can see clearly and I have laboured to express my vision because I may, by confessing, help others to look at this new movement in the right perspective which is not always easy to achieve. That is why I am at such pains to bring out what many others felt vis-à-vis sports, though few had the temerity to be so blatantly vocal about it. It was at bottom an *imaginary* grievance against what I chose to call the Western brand of discipline, imaginary not only because Mother had made it clear from the very start that joining the sports was not compulsory but also because those who joined willingly were avowedly fond of the discipline to which they had voluntarily submitted. And yet I went on inveighing against the Western ways being planted into our spiritual soil, forgetting how often, in the past, I had extolled the Westerners' way of acting on life as against ours of meek fatalism, not to mention my advocacy of their rational scepticism as against our blind acceptance of unquestioning faith and indiscriminate credulity.

But, calm as ever, Sri Aurobindo went on pointing out to me the unconscious paralogsms as well as wilful sophisms I perpetrated. I cannot quote all that he wrote to me from day to day to lead me back to his light, but a few excerpts from his letters I give here as much to testify to his humility as to bring home the vast catholicity of his spirit:



"I do not agree myself," he wrote to me in the course of a twelve-page letter, "that there is perfect discipline in the Ashram; on the contrary there is a great lack of it, much indiscipline, quarrelling and self-assertion. What there is is organisation and order which the Mother has been able to establish and maintain in spite of it all. That organisation and order is necessary for all collective work; it has been an object of admiration and surprise for all from outside who have observed the Ashram; it is the reason why the Ashram has been able to survive and outlived the malignant attacks of many people in Pondicherry who would otherwise have got it dissolved long ago. The Mother knew very well what she was doing and what was necessary for the work she has to do.

"Discipline itself is not something Western; in Oriental countries like Japan, China and India it was at one time all-regulating and supported by severe sanctions in a way that Westerners could not tolerate. Socially whatever objections we may make to it, it is a fact that it preserved Hindu religion and Hindu society through the ages and through all vicissitudes. In the political field there was on the contrary indiscipline, individualism and strife; that is one reason why India collapsed and entered into servitude. Organisation and order were attempted but failed to endure. Even in the spiritual life India has had not only the free wandering ascetic, a law to himself, but has felt impelled to create orders of *sannyasins* with their rules and governing bodies and there have also been monastic institutions with a strict discipline. Since no work can be done



successfully without these things—even the individual worker, the artist for instance, has to go through a severe discipline in order to become efficient—why should the Mother be held to blame if she insists on discipline in the exceedingly difficult work she has put in her charge?

“I don’t see on what ground you expect order and organisation to be carried on without rules and without discipline. You seem to say that people should be allowed complete freedom with only such discipline as they choose to impose upon themselves; that might do if the only thing to be done were for each individual to get some inner realisation and life did not matter or if there were no collective life or work or none that had any importance. But this is not the case here. We have undertaken a work which includes life and action and the physical world. In what I am trying to do, the spiritual realisation is the first necessity, but it cannot be complete without an outer realisation also in life, in men, in this world. Spiritual consciousness within but also spiritual life without. The Ashram as it is now is not that ideal, for that all the members have to live in a spiritual consciousness and not in the ordinary egoistic mind and mainly *rajasic* vital nature. But all the same the Ashram is a first form which our effort has taken, a field in which the preparatory work has to be done. The Mother has to maintain it and for that all this order as well as organisation has to be there and it cannot be done without rules and discipline. Discipline is even necessary for the overcoming of the ego and the mental preferences and the *rajasic* vital nature, as a help to

it at any rate. If these were overcome, outward rules etc. would be less necessary; spontaneous agreement, unity, harmony and spontaneous right action might take their place—but while the present state of things exists, the abandonment or leaving out of discipline except such as people choose or not choose for themselves, can only result in failure and disaster.”

All the same I went on finding new reasons for my dissatisfaction although all the while Mother continued to be as kind as ever, knowing full well how I was misrepresenting her. She only said once that she would wait till I saw things in the right perspective. Sri Aurobindo, however, followed a different line: he went on answering my charges against the Mother’s outlook point by point. Once he actually wrote in vindication of her tolerance:

“I do not find that Mother is a rigid disciplinarian. On the contrary, I have seen with what a constant leniency, tolerant patience and kindness she has met the huge mass of indiscipline, disobedience, self-assertion, revolt that has surrounded her, even revolt to her very face and violent letters overwhelming her with the worst kind of vituperation. A rigid disciplinarian would not have treated these things like that.”

Dr. Johnson once roared: “Sir, there is no such thing as public worry—there is only private worry.” I fear the remark conveys a large measure of truth about human psychology. We may preach from housetops about our being impelled to certain actions from abstract reason but it is very often, if not always, some half-avowed private cause or motive

from which such reasons derive. In my own case, as in that of many others—for the sports were condemned by many of us, of whom I had become a self-chosen spokesman—the reason for our unsportsmanlike attitude towards sports lay in a very private grievance. (Of course we kept it in deep purdah while flourishing the impersonal reasons as the ostensible causes of our antagonism, but the Mother knew it and had, perforce, to pass it by.) This reason, so far as it applied to my own case, was that I feared that her increase of interest in children and sportsmen was going to result definitely in a corresponding decrease of interest in those who were neither children nor sportsmen. Not that we felt this only now for the first time. No. It had begun to burrow more and more in our disgruntled selves in proportion as the Ashram members increased. Even before the advent of sports Mother had to curtail her interviews with her disciples as well as the visitors who came. Personally, I did not mind that so much, as Sri Aurobindo went on writing to *me* even after he had stopped writing to most others, so that my personal importance had never been in jeopardy. But with the advent of sports the perspective underwent a further change in that I knew very well that here I would not be able to make my mark, far less compete with the “youngsters” as I called them. So I had to accept to be left out in the cold, and as it felt rather bleak, if not freezing, hibernating there—the Mother being the life and soul of the Ashram—I cast about for a way to get in edge-ways to bask in the light of her approval. But to have to toe the line with the others



was one of these—to bow to mediocrity, the very thought of which made my fat self-love bleed. I actually saw my self-complacency gored all over, but I made as if it was something else that made me so frantic with pain: the impersonal reasons about the non-seriousness of sports. I knew that the remedy was to eat humble pie, but how could I do that without some “intellectual” bickerings? There were probably a few honest misgivings too that contributed to my unhappiness but these could not possibly have acquired the vitality necessary to the longevity of the drama which I hankered for half-consciously. I am perfectly certain that both Mother and Sri Aurobindo knew full well how I was rationalising my antipathy to sports into a sombre all-work-and-no-play philosophy, a philosophy which was, in the last analysis, utterly against my grain. But in such matters Sri Aurobindo always pressed the buttons in his invisible control-room and seldom showed his hand till at least we grew somewhat receptive to his vision and purpose. Consequently he had to wait for the time being doing, what he could in his compassion, to make the anguish of our egos a little less hard to bear. At all events that was how I myself was treated—for I went on receiving his answers to my intermittent questions about the sports. Once, for instance, I even accused him of his preoccupation with sports. I need not here frame all my charges, for these will be easily inferred from his first letters on sports which I am now going to quote at some length.

“Certainly Mother does not want only sportsmen in the Ashram: that would make it not an Ashram but a play-



ground. The sports and physical exercises are primarily for the children of the school and they also do not play only but have to attend to their studies as well. Incidentally, they have improved immensely in health and in discipline and conduct as one very valuable result. Secondly, the younger *sadhakas* are allowed, not enjoined or even recommended, to join in these sports, but certainly they are not supposed to be sportsmen only: they have other and more important things to do. To be a sportsman must necessarily be a voluntary choice and depends on having the taste and inclination. There are plenty of people around the Mother herself—Amrita, for instance—who would never dream of frequenting the playground or engaging in sports and the Mother also would never think of asking him to do so. So, equally, she could not think of being displeased with you for shunning these delights. Some, of course, might ask why any sports at all in an Ashram which ought to be concerned only with meditation and inner experiences and the escape from life into the Brahman. But that applies only to the ordinary kind of Ashram to which we have got accustomed and ours is not that orthodox kind but includes life in Yoga, and once we admit life we can introduce anything that we find useful for life's ultimate and immediate purpose and not inconsistent with the works of the Spirit. After all, the orthodox Ashram came into being only after Brahman began to shun all connection with the world and the shadow of Buddhism stalked over all the land and the Ashrams turned into monasteries. The old Ashrams were not

entirely like that; the boys and young men who were brought up in them were trained in many things belonging to life; the son of Pururavas and Urvashi practised archery in the Ashram of a Rishi and became an expert bowman and Karna became the disciple of a great sage in order to acquire from him the use of powerful weapons. So there is no *a priori* ground why sports should be excluded from the life of an Ashram like ours when we are trying to equate life with the Spirit. Even table-tennis and football need not be rigorously excluded. But putting all persiflage aside, my point is that to play or not to play is a matter of choice and inclination and it would be absurd for the Mother to be displeased with you any more than with Amrita for not caring to be a sportsman. So you need not have any apprehension on this score; that the Mother should be displeased with you for that is quite impossible. So the idea that she wished to draw away from you for anything done or not done was a misinterpretation without any real foundation since you have given no ground for it and there was nothing farther from her mind. She has herself explained that it was just the contrary that has been in her mind for some time past and it was an increasing kindness that was her feeling and intention. The only change she could expect from you was to grow in your psychic and spiritual endeavour and inner progress and in this you have not failed—quite the contrary. Apart from that, the notion that she could be displeased because you did not change according to this or that pattern is a wild idea; it would be most arbitrary and unreasonable.

"As for my going far away, your feeling is based on my slackness in giving answers to your letters, but this slackness had no such cause. My love and affection have remained always the same and it is regrettable if, by my slackness in answering your letters, I have produced the impression that I was moving farther and farther away from you. I think your recent letters have been mostly about persons recommended for *darshan* or applying for it or for accomodation, things which have to be settled by the Mother, and these were naturally most conveniently conveyed to you through Nirod's oral answers. I suppose I must have unduly extended that method of answer to other matters. I must admit that for many reasons the impulse of letter-writing and literary productivity, generally, have dwindled in me almost to zero and that must have been the real cause of my slackness. Even *Savitri* is going slow, confined mainly to revision of what has already been written, and I am as yet unable to take up the completion of Parts II and III which are not finally revised and for which a considerable amount of new matter has to be written. It is no use going into all the thousand and one reasons for this state of things for that would explain and not justify the slackness. I know very well how much you depend on my writing in answer to your letters as the one physical contact left which helps you and I shall try in future to meet the need by writing as often as possible."

This letter—written in July, 1948—would have been of immense help to me if I had been in a mood to avail myself of its directive then and there. But as I was in no such



mood I was only pleased for the time being without being aroused to correct my wrong view of it all. In Yoga, as I knew to my bitter cost, this constantly happens: taking up a wrong attitude in this arduous path of self-transformation entails consequences which grow and become, with the passage of time, more and more difficult to liquidate. That is why they always advised me to nip the noxious sapling in the bud. But I had already let it grow into a veritable philosophical tree with all my reasonings in flower and, what was more serious still, committed myself to champion a few others who were equally disgruntled. These had, in their turn, learned to look upon me as their spokesman and I saw that I could not very well withdraw all on a sudden and leave them in the lurch any more than I could forfeit the title to being their self-imposed advocate. I was uneasy about it, naturally, because in my heart of hearts I knew how foolish it was in the last resort, since I had come to the Ashram not to give a rational lead to this or that group but to follow in the footsteps of the Guru in genuine humility. This I did realise even when I was busy swelling the chorus of the opposition of those who had shoved me into the foreground. But to know something is not always to feel like profiting by the knowledge. The Old Adam in each of us does not let go of his hold without a bitter struggle. So I struggled on till I came to the last phase which, for exigencies of space, I shall describe as briefly as I can.

It so happened that labouring as I was under my fancied grievance, aggravated by a will to cling to my declared stand,



I chose to forget this all-too-patent fact, which Vivekananda used to deplore so constantly and witheringly, that we, Indians, had not only grown exceedingly *tamasic* but too apt to take our *tamas* for *sattwa*. Nevertheless the irony of it was that I could not help noting that those of us who condemned the sports as too *rajasic* had hardly looked anything but glum when Mother used to hold daily collective meditation in the Ashram. Many used to be either in a fidget or feel drowsy, and some actually went off to sleep happily snoring if and when Mother happened to stay in trance for even twenty or thirty minutes, as often happened with her in her meditative moods. Not for nothing had Vivekananda said scathingly: "These *tamasic* people will pass their lives in wrong actions or sloth and then run helplessly to us, Yogis, in the expectation that we shall redeem their misery with miracles of Yoga. They will persevere in nothing....nor undertake any serious *sadhana*. My campaign is against such miracle-mongering psuedo-spirituality." I knew that in this Mother and Sri Aurobindo had all along been at one with the great Vedantin, having always been against our temperamental penchant for lolling in vital lethargy and mental somnolence masquerading as *sattwic* meditative spirituality. In point of fact this was one of the reasons why they held works undertaken in the right attitude as of the essence of their Integral Yoga. Besides, without works not only must our nature remain untransformed, but no real acceptance of life can follow. And since sports came their way and helped us grow out of our lacklustre sloth, they decided to utilize

them, as Mother wanted to show us how. Not that this was the whole story about the sports. By no means. For it was only too obvious that she could not possibly have changed overnight and taken to sports for sports' sake: she was carrying on a new and an important experiment but though this was not altogether a mere conjecture on my part I would prefer not to speculate about it. Those who would have more light on this subject may consult Sri Aurobindo's two articles entitled "Perfection of the Body" and "Divine Body" in the second and third issues of the *Bulletin* in 1949, in which they will find, among other things, that to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo this body is not a mere conglomeration of irredeemable matter which serves only as a pitiful cage of the immortal soul, but a veritable "temple of the Divine." My mistake had been to equate his approval of the body with that of the West. For although he had all along aimed at complete harmony, a rich synthesis of cultures welded by the light of the spirit, he had never swerved an inch from the spiritual outlook which posits that mind, life and body must at every step canalise the Divine Purpose through the dynamism of the Spirit. "From within without" was Gurudev's mantra as he had once written to me in a letter. Thus to him body was valuable not for its own sake but because, to quote from his second message, "even it could become a revealing vessel of a supreme beauty and bliss—casting the beauty of the light of the spirit, suffusing and radiating from it as a lamp reflects and diffuses the luminosity of its indwelling flame, carrying in itself the beatitude of the

spirit, its joy of the seeing mind, its joy and life of spiritual happiness, the joy of Matter released into a spiritual consciousness and thrilled with a constant ecstasy." That was his vision of the place and function of the perfect body in a full and rich life guided by the spirit and surrendered to the Divine who informs that deep Resident in a mass of seemingly inert matter. For nothing less would have made him write in his message on the Perfection of the Body: "If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis....*Shariram khalu dharmasadhanam*... the means of fulfilment of dharma, and dharma means every ideal which we can propose to ourselves and the law of its working out and its action."

But though all this was not by any means unknown to me, I stumbled grievously, I repeat, because of my attachment to a false pride and reluctance to reprimand my self-love. Otherwise, I claim; I would not have cut such a sorry figure at this late day after having gone through so much all these years; and foolish, to boot, in that when I indicted so eloquently the boisterous lightheartedness imported by "a thoughtless crew of children and youngsters who were fit for nothing better than fun and frolics" I simply forgot how, in the good old days, I had protested as loudly against the sombre and laughter-killing atmosphere of the Ashram! Isn't the human mind too clever by half in wanting to direct the identical arguments to support diametrically opposite inferences?

But to think that I could have actually framed a charge



against Gurudev himself who never stirred out of his flat for over twenty years! In reply he wrote a fairly long letter again on sports in which after assuring me once more that Mother did not "want anybody to take up sports" if he had "no inclination or natural bent for them" he added (4-3-49):

"I do not understand what you mean by my giving my time to sports! I am not giving any time to it except that, at the Mother's request, I have written an article for the first number of the *Bulletin* and another for the forthcoming number. It is the Mother who is doing all the rest of the work for the organisation of the sports and that she must do, obviously, till it is sufficiently organised to go on of itself with only a general supervision from above and her actual presence once a day. I put out my force to support her as in all the other work of the Ashram, but otherwise I am not giving any of my time to sports. As to my silence, I do not think I have neglected anything you have asked for whenever you have written. Perhaps you mean your report of the interview you had with me which you want to publish in America? But this I have to consider carefully as to what parts can be published.<sup>1</sup> Of late I have been very much under pressure of work for the press which needed immediate attention and could not be postponed, mostly correction of manuscripts and proofs; but I hope

<sup>1</sup> He later gave me the necessary permission to have upon interview, revised by him, was published in full in the American edition of my *Among the Great* (pp. 331-359).



to make an arrangement which will rid me of most of this tedious and uninteresting work so that I can turn my time to better purposes. I am conscious all the same that my remissness in writing had been excessive and that you have a just cause for your complaint; but I hope to remedy this remissness in future as it is not at all due to my indifference but to a visitation of indolence of the creative will which has extended even to the completion of the unfinished parts of *Savitri*. I hope soon to get rid of this inability, complete *Savitri* and satisfy your just demand for more alertness in my correspondence with you."

This letter startled me once more back into good sense, the more because I was unspeakably moved by his humility—which was borne home to me so vividly because of my signal lack of it—and was, besides, stung by remorse that I should have presumed so much upon his tolerance of one so importunate as myself. I penned a letter assuring him that I would behave myself better in future. But alas, I could not keep my word: the loose talk of some enthusiastic sportsmen upset me directly afterwards and I had to seek clarification once again. For the idea was abroad that the Supramental Yoga had taken a new orientation and therefore could no longer be practised by anyone who did not join at once in the Ashram drill and sports. So I asked him anxiously if there was any truth in the contention of these alarmist reporters.

If I had stopped there I might have defended myself if with bad grace. But once again, as I wrote away impulsively, my old pent grievance got the better of me and I

asked him whether Mother intended to coerce all of us into sports by encouraging such wild gossip. "For," I declaimed, "anything smelling of coercion is anathema to me and what they contend is that Mother may not actually 'command' anyone to join the sports but has her 'inscrutable' ways and knows how to make dissidence toe the line. But I do not imagine," I railed, "that she would have to be so 'inscrutable' as all that to achieve her end since she can so easily adopt a much simpler method—just refuse to smile on those who dislike sports. It has been effective enough in the past and I do not see how it can possibly be less so in the future. Only, Guru, it reminds me of what you once said, when somebody enthused over Gandhiji's slogan of non-violence and dislike of coercion. You remarked: 'But can there possibly be a more effective way of coercing those who love you than to say that you will fast unto death unless and until they do what you believe to be right?' Now tell me, if Mother should start now by withholding her smile from those who are averse to sports, would it not amount to a similar coercion? I hope, however, that the croakers are wrong. But if so, will you kindly assure me *in unambiguous terms* that such statements are, indeed, mischievous rumours? It is high time too that you spoke out, for you know human nature too well to deny that an allegation, however silly and incredible, is quickly accepted as gospel truth by the multitude, if and when it is echoed often and loudly enough in chorus. And shall I tell you something more? You, yourself, Guru, by writing about the Divine Body in the second issue of the

*Bulletin* have definitely lent weight to such facile fantasies. For many have been asseverating of late that this Divine Body can be manufactured only in the foundry of collective drill and sports and athletics. I feel just dismayed What are things coming to?"

To that he wrote back once more in his unruffled vein, dealing with the counts of my indictment one by one in due sequence.

"Much less than half the Ashram, the majority of them boys and girls and children, have taken up sports; the rest have not been pressed to do so and there is no earthly reason why any pressure should be put upon you. The Mother has never intended to put any such pressure on you and if anybody has said that, there is no foundation whatever for what they have told you.

"It is also not a fact that either the Mother or I are turning away from Yoga and intend to interest ourselves only in sports; we have no intention whatever of altering the fundamental character of the Ashram and replacing it by a sportive association. If we did that, it would be a most idiotic act and if anybody should have told you anything like that, he must be off his head or in a temporary crisis or delirious enthusiasm or obsessed by a very upside-down idea. The Mother told you very clearly once through Nirod that what was being done in the playground was not meditation for Yoga but only an ordinary concentration for the physical exercises alone. If she is busy with the organisation of these things—and it is not true that she is busy with that alone—it is in order to get finished with that as soon as possible



after which it will go on of itself without her being at all engrossed or specially occupied by it, as is the case with other works of the Ashram. As for myself, it is surely absurd to think that I am neglecting my Yoga being interested only in running, jumping and marching! There seem to have been strange misunderstandings about my second message in the *Bulletin*. In the first I wrote about sports and their utility just as I have written on politics or social development or any other matter. In the second, I took up the question, incidentally, because people were expressing ignorance as to why the Ashram should concern itself with sports at all. I explained why it had been done and dealt with the more general question of how this and other human activities could be part of a search for a total perfection of all parts of the being including the body and what would be the nature of the perfection of the body. I indicated clearly that only by Yoga could there come a supreme and total perfection of all the instruments of the spirit and the ascent of the whole being to the highest level and a divine life on earth and the assumption of a divine body. I made it clear that by human and physical means such as sports only a limited and precarious human perfection could come. In all this there is nothing to justify the idea that sports could be a means of jumping on the Supermind or that the Supermind was going to descend into the playground and nowhere else and only those who are there will receive it; that would be a bad look-out for me as I would have no chance!

"I write all this in the hope of clearing away all the



strange misconceptions with which the air seems to have become thick and by some of which you may have been affected. I wish to assure you that my love and affection and the Mother's love and affection are constantly with you. We have nothing for you but love and affection and a full appreciation of all you have done for us, your work, your service, your labour to make people over there appreciate our Ashram and what it stands for and to turn men's minds favourably towards us and what we are trying to do. As for me, you should realise that the will to help you towards divine realisation is one of the things that has been constantly nearest to my heart and will always be there.

"This is not the letter I intended to write which must wait. It is not possible for me to write a whole answer now since it is already one o'clock, and I shall continue it tonight."

This did something to assuage my fears, but I wanted to press my advantage and be reassured still more.

"Tell me, Guru," I importuned, "what exactly are you wanting us to achieve at this stage of our *sadhana*? Could it possibly be that you have lately had a new revelation which has induced you to scotch in a lump the older ones? In other words, do you now want to condemn unqualifiedly India's advocacy of *vairagya* and other-worldliness?—If so, are we to infer that it has to be replaced *in toto* by the Western outlook on life? It is not I alone who am at sea here but D also who told me the other day that in spite of his great reverence for you he finds it a little difficult to understand your stress on this-worldliness to the exclusion of other-worldliness. I have, as you know, believed so far

that you aim at a new and richer synthesis, a harmonisation of seemingly contradictory elements of life so that human culture may achieve, at long last, its final 'unity in diversity'—to quote your own phrase or, to use a musical simile, a symphony wherein even the dissonances will be resolved into concords of a deeper amplitude. And lastly, Guru, tell me once and for all, and frankly: do you really think that I may yet come to have a place in this your ultra-modern Yoga of yours? This doubt now vexes my mind once again with a redoubled force because I suspect that I have somehow turned out a misfit though, alas, rather late in the day. For if my surmise is really baseless why do such doubts go on recurring after so *many* years of struggle?"

After despatching the letter in hot-haste I rued my impulsiveness in leisure, because I feared that my provocative words had left him no alternative but to agree with me as to my flowering into an exemplary failure. In a word, I felt like a suicide who after digging his own grave stands aghast at the prospect of having to descend into it alive. So my exuberant joy may be imagined when, next morning, I received his reply dripping tenderness. Patiently and laboriously as ever he answered me once again:

"I continue my letter," he wrote calmly as though nothing had happened at all in the interim. "I hope I have been able to persuade you that all these ideas about sports and the Yoga are misconceptions and that those who suggest them are wholly mistaken. Certainly, we are not putting Yoga away into the background and turning

to sports as a substitute. I hope also that you will accept from me and the Mother our firm asseveration that our love and affection for you are undiminished and that there has been no coldness on the Mother's part and not the least diminution in my constant inner relation with you.

"In view of what I have written, you ought to be able to see that your idea of our insistence on you to take up sport or to like it or to accept it in any way has no foundation. I myself have never been a sportsman nor—apart from taking a spectator's interest in cricket in England or a non-player member of the Baroda Club—taken up any physical games or athletics except some exercises learnt from Madras wrestlers in Baroda such as *dand* or *baithak* and those I took up only to put some strength and vigour into a frail and weak though not unhealthy body, but I never attached any importance or significance to these things and dropped the exercises when I thought they were no longer necessary. Certainly, neither the abstinence from athletics and physical games nor the taking up of those physical exercises has for me any relevance to Yoga. Neither your aversion to sports nor the liking of others for it makes either you or them more fit or more unfit for *sadhana*. So there is absolutely no reason why you should vex your mind with the supposition that we want you to do it. You are surely quite free, as everybody is quite free, to take your own way in such matters.

"One thing I feel I must say in connection with your remark about the soul of India and D's observation about



my 'stress on this-worldliness to the exclusion of other-worldliness.' I do not quite understand in what connection his remark was made or what he meant by 'this-worldliness,' but I feel it necessary to state my own position in the matter. My own life and my Yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side. All human interests are, I suppose, this-worldly and most of them have entered into my mental field and some, like politics, into my life, but at the same time, since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them. For me all is Brahman and I find the Divine everywhere. Everyone has the right to throw away this-worldliness and choose other-worldliness only, and if he finds peace by that choice he is greatly blessed. I, personally, have not found it necessary to do this in order to have peace. In my Yoga also I found myself moved to include both worlds in my view—the spiritual and the material—and to try to establish the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Power in men's hearts and



earthly life, not for a personal salvation only but for a Divine life here. This seems to me as spiritual an aim as any, and the fact of this life taking up earthly pursuits and earthly things into its scope cannot, I believe, tarnish its spirituality or alter its Indian character. This at least has always been my view and experience of the reality and the nature of the world and things and the Divine: it seemed to me as nearly as possible the integral truth about them and I have therefore spoken of the pursuit of it as the Integral Yoga. Everyone is, of course, free to reject and disbelieve in this kind of integrality or to believe in the spiritual necessity of an entire other-worldliness altogether but that would make the exercise of my Yoga impossible.

"My Yoga can include indeed a full experience of the other worlds, the plane of the Supreme Spirit and the other planes in between and their possible effects upon our life and material world; but it will be quite possible to insist only on the realisation of the Supreme Being or Ishwara even in one aspect, Shiva, Krishna as Lord of the world and Master of ourselves and our works or else the Universal *Sachchidananda* and attain to the essential result of this Yoga and afterwards to proceed from them to the integral results if one accepted the ideal of the divine life and the material world conquered by the Spirit. It is this view and experience of things and of the truth of existence that enabled me to write *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*. The realisation of the Supreme, the Ishwara, is certainly the essential thing; but to approach Him with love and devotion and

*bhakti*, to serve Him with one's works and to know Him, not necessarily by the intellectual cognition, but in a spiritual experience is also essential in the path of Integral Yoga. If you accept Krishnaprem's insistence that this and no other must be *your* path, that it is this *you* have to attain and realise, then any exclusive other-worldliness cannot be *your* way. I believe that you are quite capable of attaining this and realising the Divine and I have never been able to share your constantly recurring doubts about your incapacity and their persistent recurrence as a valid ground for believing that they can never be overcome. Such a persistent recurrence has been a feature in the *sadhana* of many who have finally emerged and reached the goal; even the *sadhana* of very great Yogis has not been exempt from such violent and constant recurrences, they have sometimes been the special objects of such persistent assaults, as I have indeed indicated in *Savitri* in more places than one, and that was indeed founded on my own experience. In the nature of these recurrences there is usually a constant return of the same adverse experiences, the same adverse resistance, thoughts destructive of all belief and faith and confidence in the future of the *sadhana*, frustrating doubts of what one has known as the truth, urgings to the abandonment of the Yoga or to other disastrous counsels of *déchéance*. The course taken by the attacks is not indeed the same for all but still they have a strong family resemblance. One can eventually overcome if one begins to realise the nature and source of these assaults and acquire the faculty of observing them, bearing them (without being

involved or absorbed into their gulf), finally becoming the witness of their phenomena and understanding them and refusing the mind's sanction even when the vital is still tossed in the whirl or the most outward physical mind still reflects the adverse suggestions. In the end these attacks lose their power and fall away from the nature; the recurrence becomes feeble or has no power to last: even, if the detachment is strong enough, they can be cut out very soon or at once. The strongest attitude to take is to regard these things as what they really are: incursions of dark forces from outside taking advantage of certain openings in the physical mind or vital part, but not a real part of oneself or spontaneous creation in one's own nature. To create a confusion and darkness in the physical mind and to throw into it or awaken in it mistaken ideas, dark thoughts, false impressions is a favourite method of these assailants, and if they can get the support of the mind from overconfidence in its own correctness or the natural rightness of its impressions and inferences, then they can have a field day until the true mind reasserts itself and blows the clouds away. Another device of theirs is to awake some hurt or rankling sense of grievance in the lower parts and keep them hurt or rankling as long as possible. In that case one has to discover these openings in one's nature and learn to close them permanently to such attacks or to throw out intruders at once or as soon as possible. The recurrence is no proof of a fundamental incapacity; if one takes the right inner attitude it can and will be overcome. One must have faith in the Master of our life and works, even if for a long



time He conceals Himself, and then in His own right time He will reveal His Presence.

"You have always believed in Guruvada: I would ask you then to put your faith in the Guru and the guidance and rely on the Ishwara for fulfilment, to have faith in my abiding love and affection, in the affection and divine goodwill and loving kindness of the Mother, stand firm against all attacks and go forward perseveringly towards the spiritual goal and the all-fulfilling and all-satisfying touch of the All-blissful, the Ishwara."

This long and loving letter infused as it were a new life-blood of hope into my resigning heart. But although I could see that by giving me a long rope he was attempting to convert my discomfiture into success—as he had done with many another—I could not yet feel strong enough to "screw my courage to the sticking place." My ego was still strongly alive and blustering. Otherwise I should have joined the sports then and there if only to pass the test to which I was now subjected—as all have to, at every step. And my crisis made me realise, as never before, that however honest and sincere one might feel in the abstract realm of aspiration, whenever it comes to the pinch one must accept the course which will lead to the change. In other words, the last test of sincerity is not breaking out into emotional gush or exuberance which goes by the name of *bhakti*—though this too helps—but to surrender one's self-will in every shape or form. The question was not sports or this or that but—as it must be, every time and in the last analysis—doing the Guru's will. I felt, indeed, genuinely penitent, but could



not bring myself yet to bend my self-will to the Guru's. In a word, I temporised: "Why hasten to join the sports now that Gurudev and Mother have both assured that it is unnecessary? Let's wait and see..."

I do not say that everybody has to join the sports to feel that he has crossed the Rubicon. My point is that since I realised that here I reacted *violently* against the Guru's will, I ought to have forced myself to bow to that will rather than pamper my own. But here again all sorts of sophistries cropped up and I stayed away from the sports and went on working harder than ever—hoping that work should soften the knot of the ego till it could be cut without too much bleeding.

Just at this time—or rather a few months later—an avowed disciple of mine, whom I named Indira, fell very ill. If I were free to write about her in detail, as I would like, I could have made this perhaps the most interesting chapter of my Ashram-life from the point of view of the general reader, but as she is utterly opposed to my presenting her spiritual experiences to the public I will confine myself to this that in my life of varied experiences I have seldom met a stranger personality who, at so young an age, seemed so astonishingly mature for the spiritual life. I was deeply impressed by her sincerity, truthfulness, intelligence, power of sustained work, poetical gift, capacity for spiritual experience and, above all, her incredible purity of character. But being exceedingly sensitive she has suffered much which all but ruined her health. She fell very ill in November 1949 and her condition rapidly deteriorated till

her life was despaired of. Advised by Gurudev and Mother, I went to her in December. She was totally bed-ridden and could not even turn over from one side to another without help. It was now a case of touch and go. She had been vomiting blood twice a day for some time past and though after I had written to Gurudev about it the vomiting stopped, she lay bed-ridden in the last stage of prostration. When I saw her in December 1949, she was reduced to a shadow—a ghost of her once radiant and beautiful self. Her husband was effusive in his gratefulness to me. 'Now she would recover,' he said because I had come with Gurudev's force and Mother's blessings. But when I saw her my heart utterly misgave me, for though I knew that she had already been called and chosen I did not see how her terrible convulsions were going to be remedied. Gurudev had, indeed, written to me that she had achieved "an advanced spiritual consciousness" and added: "I will try to the end; for my experience is that even a hopeless effort in the fields of the working of the spiritual force is often better than none and can bring in the intervention of the miracle." But having been temporarily somewhat shy of the word "miracle" I wrote to him:

"You remind me, Guru, of Shelley's characterisation of 'love' as a word 'too often profaned'. I have often felt that had he been born in India he would have substituted the word 'miracle' for love.

"No, Guru, I have never had a strong weakness for what we, Indians, so wistfully call 'faith in miracles'. So I can

only hope, against hope, that its agency may come to our rescue not just too late. For I have gathered from the doctors that Indira has been suffering from chronic asthma, deep thrombosis, dilatation of the heart, osteo-arthritis, low blood-pressure, utter lack of appetite, anaemia and God knows what else, still undiagnosed. So I am afraid you will have to invoke *a major miracle* if you really mean business."

But the major miracle did happen!—at the eleventh hour she recovered. This made a difference even to my sceptic mind in that I won here a *point d'appui* for my faith in Yogic powers achieving results which I can only describe as too incredible to be discredited. But I prefer to close this episode with a relevant letter which Gurudev wrote to me at this time in reply to some questions of mine which will be easily inferred from what follows.

"I might say a word about Sri Ramakrishna's attitude with regard to the body. He seems always to have regarded it as a misuse of spiritual force to utilise it for taking care of the body or curing its ailments. Other Yogis—I do not speak of those who think it justifiable to develop Yogic *siddhis*—have not had this complete disregard of the body: they have taken care to maintain it in good health and condition as an instrument or a physical basis for their development in Yoga. I have always been in agreement with this view: moreover, I have never had any hesitation in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in myself and in others—that is indeed why the Mother gives



flowers not only as a blessing but as a help in illness. I put a value on the body first as an instrument, *dharma-sadhana*, or, more fully, as a centre of manifested personality in action, a basis of spiritual life and activity as of all life and activity upon earth, but also because, for me, the body as well as the mind and life is a part of the Divine Whole, a form of the Spirit and therefore not to be disregarded or despised as something incurable, gross and incapable of spiritual realisation or of spiritual use. Matter itself is secretly a form of the Spirit and has to reveal itself as that, can be made to wake to consciousness and evolve and realise the Spirit, the Divine within it. In my view the body as well as the mind and life has to be spiritualised or, one may say divinised so as to be a fit instrument and receptacle for the realisation of the Divine. It has its part in the Divine *lila*, even according to the Vaishanava *sadhana* in the joy and beauty of Divine Love. That does not mean that the body has to be valued for its own separate sake or that the creation of a divine body in a future evolution of the whole being has to be contemplated as an end and not as a means—that would be a serious error, which would not be admissible.”

I have a special purpose in quoting this letter. Paradoxical though it may sound, I have all along had a marked streak of the other-worldly *vairagya* in my composition which was not a little responsible for my protracted struggles in the Ashram. Yet when I saw my own disciple in the throes of death I could not help but pray for her recovery, as much to save her life as to get rid of my own pain. And it was



only when she recovered that I realised anew as it were that no Yoga could be held to be truly satisfying to sensitive, refined souls which despised Matter as incompatible with the spirit or belittled the place of the body in spiritual life. For although Sri Aurobindo admitted that "the body is the creation of the Inconscient," he declined to accept it at its face value because "what we call the Inconscient is an appearance, a dwelling place, an instrument of a secret Consciousness or a Superconscious which has created the miracle we call the universe. Matter is the field and the creation of the Inconscient and the perfection of the operations of inconscient Matter, their perfect adaptation of means to an aim and end, the wonders they perform and the marvels of beauty they create, testify, in spite of all the ignorant denial we can oppose, to the presence and power of consciousness of this Superconscience in every part and movement of the material universe. It is there in the body, has made the body and its emergence in our consciousness is the secret aim of evolution and the key to the mystery of our existence."<sup>1</sup>

Today his messages such as these seem to win to a new vibrancy of a far deeper significance. Why—since Indira had not even accepted *him* as her Guru—did he write to me when I felt like giving up: "so long as there is the slightest shadow of a hope we must fight to the end to save her"? And why did he enjoin on me at this time to

<sup>1</sup> "*Perfection of the Body*" by Sri Aurobindo: "Bulletin of Physical Education", April, 1949.

act as her Guru when I felt I could not accept anybody at the that stage of my *sadhana*?

"You can help and have helped her and others," he wrote, "and drawn them to the spiritual path and you have made many turn towards us who of their own motion would not have thought of doing so. There is a power in you to draw others like that and it seems that not only nature but the Divine has put it in you for this service and that it is quite right that you should use it for Him as you have done. There can be no harm in using His gifts for Him when it is done in the right spirit."

But why did he write like that to me, a disciple who could not look upon even one so perfect as Himself in quite the right spirit nor fully understand his encouragements? I recall, sadly, how I was depressed once because he loomed so far—almost like a mythical figure. And yet he assured me:

"It is a strong and lasting personal relation that I have felt with you ever since we met and *even before* and it is only that that has been the base of all the outward support, consideration, care and constant helping endeavour which I have always extended towards you and which could not have arisen from any tepid impersonal feeling. On my side that relation is not likely to change ever.

"Even before I met you for the first time, I knew of you and felt at once the contact of one with whom I had that relation which declares itself constantly through many lives and followed your career (all that I could hear about it) with a close sympathy and interest. It is a feeling which

is never mistaken and gives the impression of *one not only close to one but a part of one's existence*. The Mother had not heard of you before you came here for the first time, but even on that occasion on seeing you—though without any actual meeting—she had a sympathetic contact. The relation that is so indicated always turns out to be that of those who have been together in the past and were predestined to join again (though the past circumstances may not be known) drawn together by old ties. It was the same inward recognition (apart even from the deepest spiritual connection) that brought you here. If the outer consciousness does not fully realise this, it is because of the crust always created by a new physical birth that prevents it. But the soul knows all the while."

But strange as it may seem, even such a letter as this only deepened my gloom at the time. For Him who was so far-seeing and flawless to write in that strain to one who was so flawed and blind as myself! How could he have loved me as he did—a disciple who was weighed so often and found worth dismissing? What indeed had I brought to him except worry and trouble? Not only on my own account but also on that of almost everyone I have cared for? I remember how lovingly he had tried once to save another pupil of mine, Srimati Uma Bose, the "Nightingale of Bengal," who died at twenty-one and, when I felt bereaved, how compassionately he consoled me! I had asked him (in 1942):

"But why did such a lovely flower fade away prematurely even before blossoming—thus casting a gloom on all who



knew her and loved her for her exquisite singing and snow-pure character? And then look at the lengthening shadows all over the world! I do believe in Grace but it acts, I take it, only under certain conditions which seem exceedingly unlikely to be fulfilled by recipients such as we. So why waste your precious time and energy on such a world where the divine guidance looks almost accidental and out of place, to all intents and purposes?"

He was not writing at all in those days. In fact since 1938 he had all but stopped writing to us. Yet as soon as he received my sad query—in February, 1942—he answered, and an answer of light it was to my groping soul.

"The question you have put raises one of the most difficult and complicated of all problems and to deal with it at all adequately would need an answer as long as the longest chapter of my *Life Divine*. I can only state my own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience that there *is* such a guidance and that nothing *is* in vain in this universe.

"If we look only at the outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most, we see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge—even scientific knowledge—comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden



process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering, and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as this 'unhappy and transient world,' *anityam asukham*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanical inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something beyond its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then, inevitably, there must be a guidance—and that means that there *is* a supporting Consciousness and Will with which we can come into an inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual or eventual failure.

"This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience, error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently, too, a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty—at least a partial flowering of these things. The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and must be leading the individual certainly, and the world presumably, towards that higher state but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and dark-

ness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms, still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a higher Light, Truth and Bliss; the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

“The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can only get an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge or vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and observe how they all tended without our knowing it towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made—not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of further experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and move-

ments help to determine our course; they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come which helps or directly guides or moves us: it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them—except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

“It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world movement. That seems to move according to the conditions and laws or forces of the moment through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens at a particular juncture or the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophical, is not ultimately determinative. Here, too, one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case but also, the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all. Falsehood and Darkness are strong everywhere on the earth, and have always been so and at times they seem to dominate; but there have also been not only gleams but out-



bursts of the Light. In the maze of things and the long course of Time, whatever may be the appearance of this or that epoch or movement, the growth of Light is there and the struggle towards better things does not cease. At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful; but even if we reject the assertion of the mystics and prophets since early times that such a condition of things must precede the Manifestation and is even a sign of its approach, yet it does not necessarily indicate the decisive victory—even temporary—of the Falsehood. It merely means that the struggle between the forces is at its acme. The result may very well be the stronger emergence of the best that can be; for the world-movement often works in that way. I leave it at that and say nothing more.

“Uma Bose had reached a stage of her development marked by a predominance of the *sattwic* nature, but not a strong vital (which works towards a successful or fortunate life) or the opening to a higher light—her mental upbringing and surroundings stood against that and she herself was not ready. The early death and much suffering may have been the result of past (prenatal) influences or they may have been chosen by her own psychic being as a passage towards a higher state for which she was not yet prepared but towards which she was moving. This and the nonfulfilment of her capacities could be a final tragedy if there were this life alone. As it is, she has passed towards the psychic sleep to prepare for her life to come.”



Yes, he was always like that: so ready to comply whenever I invited him to help—no matter who it was. And it was with the same kind interest that he dealt with a genius or a multi-millionaire as with a wastrel or an orphan. Also he did it so spontaneously—almost as if it were the least he could do—that it was, indeed, sometimes difficult to be grateful to him or even to recognise it for compassion. How often have I wondered whether this might not have been due to his *way* of giving: he made as though he simply had to come to people's help without criticizing them at all. I wrote to him once that his way of "reforming by love as against reprimand" did remind one of Vivekananda's famous dictum: "Every step that has been really gained in the world has been gained by love; criticizing can never do any good; it has been tried for thousands of years. Condemnation accomplishes nothing."<sup>1</sup>

And yet what was this love which he or Vivekananda had so vividly realised? Can we ever really know from *our* experience of love on the human level? What was the love which made him stake everything dear to mortals for something we do not even understand—the Supermind, whose "advent" he prophesied to be "inevitable"? Some of his critics blindly charged him with an inordinate ambition. Once I had written to him that these poohpoohed him because he was lusting for greatness and wanting to achieve something which even Krishna did not succeed in establishing on earth. To that he wrote:

<sup>1</sup> *Inspired Talks* p. 75

"It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense. I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth-consciousness. I see it above and know what it is—I feel it ever gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half-light, half-darkness. I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth-evolution. If greater men than myself have not had this vision and this ideal before them, that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth-sense and Truth-vision. If human reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of X or Y or anybody else in that. It is a question between the Divine and myself—whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way for its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption—I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others."

Unfortunately, human nature has a penchant for sectarianism which seems to be all but ineradicable. This is why even such a soul-stirring and unexceptionable letter was misinterpreted by some who accused him of belittling

Krishna's greatness! But though by nature humble to the core, he would sweep everything aside ruthlessly if and when his vision demanded it: he would then cut away from his moorings however safe and sacrosanct, and count no price too great to pay for the following of the inner call of his Faith and Vision. Unfortunately, we who have learnt to swear by reason have grown a little too fond of regarding faith somewhat as a Don Quixote who may, on occasions, be loveable enough, but a little too simple to be taken seriously. But when we choose thus to let reason deride faith we forget that two can play at that game, and Faith may retort that Reason too may sometimes behave as the knight of famous folly when it

Sits on a high horse-back of argument  
To tilt for ever with a wordy lance  
In a mock tournament where none can win.<sup>1</sup>

But though *his* faith appealed to us, moderns, because it originally emerged like fecund fire out of an impact between his heart's vision and mind's doubt, I must still confess—though not altogether in tears of penitence—that I myself have never found it easy to keep faith with faith, as will have been borne home to my reader. But after his passing away I began dimly to see something which I can only ask those to accept who knew him for what he was. It is nothing, I repeat, but a home-coming to simple faith.

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri* Book II, Canto X



It began to dawn on me now, after I had turned the full circle, that man at the culmination of his vision must revert to the child: to wit, those who have grown old enough in wisdom must become like simple children once again who live by and grow in faith alone. To put it differently, we who have seen the "wordy futility of reason" must now hark back to faith—not in rumour and hearsay, but in the bugle call heard by the highest spirits in every age. To us, who have heard *his* clarion, there can be no question of rating the light of anybody else as higher in our epoch. So our faith must stay loyal to him and the Mother whom he claimed as one with him in essence, and who is dedicated to consummate what he seems to have left unaccomplished. After his withdrawal one of the messages she gave was:

"The lack of receptivity of the earth and men is mostly responsible for the decision Sri Aurobindo has taken regarding his body. But one thing is certain: what has happened on the physical plane affects in no way the truth of his teaching. All that he has said is perfectly true and remains so. Time and the course of events will prove it abundantly."

As I pondered its import I felt a deep pang: how self-willed we, his disciples, had been—how recalcitrant and unhelpful—more or less! A remark of Dostoevsky's in *Brothers Karamazov* recurred to me which I had once dismissed as too extravagant. The great pessimist had said that each of us must be held partly responsible for the total misery and suffering of the world. It was not a pleasant thought and so I still wanted to argue it away. But I failed now in that I for one could no longer disclaim my responsi-



bility for the "decision" which Gurudev had had to take. But since he has taken it, it would be, at best, idle to rue our past endeavours and delinquencies. For did he not himself bequeath to us the guiding mantra of his own life in one of his most moving letters?—

"As for faith, you write as if I never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than any one living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work. But even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing( which is impossible) I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe. But why should I feel that all this may come to nothing when I see each step and where it is leading and every week and day—once it was every year and month and hereafter it will be every day and hour—brings me nearer to my goal? In the way that one treads with the greater Light above, even every difficulty gives its help and has its value and Night itself carries in it the burden of the Light that has to be."

I do not say we can hope to emulate him. But we shall be utterly false to him if we now take an attitude of false humility and say that we cannot possibly count. For it is because each of us, however small, *does* count that he counted no cost in working for us sleeplessly to give us his lead of light. To be called by him is to be chosen as

instruments, however inconspicuous, for his divine work, the task for which he sacrificed everything and to which he dedicated all he had and was. I cannot claim that to me, personally, he is still living as he is to the Mother. But since I have fundamentally believed in her always, I must refuse to believe that he can be less than acting on us even today since otherwise I would have to conclude that he has partly failed. To believe that would be disbelieving him since he said *he could not possibly fail*. But not to disbelieve in him is not enough: we must do his will now as never before—that is the new call of the hour we have to answer every moment now. In other words, we must live every moment as *he* would constantly have us live when he was there to show us how. But for that to be possible we must accept to change, each of us, and follow his lead in our inmost hearts which we can only accomplish by accepting the outer lead of one whom he considered his equal: the Mother, his *Shakti*, who, “alone with her self and death and destiny,” shall complete what he began. because, he prophesies:

Even if he seems to leave her to her lone strength,  
Even though all falters and falls and sees an end  
And the heart fails and only are death and night,  
God-given her strength can battle against doom  
Even on a brink where Death alone seems close  
And no human strength can hinder or can help.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, The Book of Fate. Here “he” refers to Satyavan who is to die and “she” refers to Savitri.

A new faith burgeoned deep down in my core as the new vista opened when I beheld, for the last time, his face of light lying in the repose of *Yoganidra* with an aureole around which seemed reluctant to leave him.

Then I saw the Mother, "too unlike the world she came to help and save." She said to me: "Sri Aurobindo is here, with us, as living as ever."

I confess I did not quite know at the time how to take it, but of this I was sure—that she could never utter a vain platitude, far less temporise with what was false. I felt near to her as never before. To do now what she wants has suddenly grown not only incumbent but a simple act of joy. But this time I was determined not to achieve what I had to in a half-hearted way, nor stay satisfied with a mere inner surrender to the Guru's will. The inner resolve has, at some time or other, to be tested by outer action. So I joined the sports.

To the general reader this may well sound like an anti-climax. But those who have experienced how easily the easy becomes difficult in Yoga—because the ego, getting aggravated, stubbornly contests every inch of ground before yielding—will guess why I refer to it. The last hurdle sincerity has to cross must be set in the field of action.

But nothing that is done in a true spirit of offering can seem trivial to the Divine Witness of all that we think, will or do. And though the Goal is still far and the path precipitous, in rare moments one does feel even in this stifling world, a sense of liberation—accruing through a

strange dispensation of a Wisdom too far to be hailed as kin and yet too real to be dismissed as the mere fantasy of a chance mood. And it can become more than a glimpse only if we aspire after it as steadfastly as we can. For then alone is it given to us to break the bars of the cage against which the prisoned Bird of Fire beats its wings, or shall I say: then alone will the cage be transformed into a temple of Love, claiming kinship with the skies of Light?

THE END



## POSTSCRIPT

(A lecture delivered by the author at the Green's Hotel, Bombay, on 11. 12. 51—twelve months after the passing of the great Sage)

It has been said that the greatness of a man is the greatness of his greatest moments. To make its meaning clear one might well add "moments of vision." This qualifying clause is necessary for the simple reason that pragmatic man is, indeed, a little too apt to judge others in terms of their concrete achievements in the visible arena of action. But although it is true that what one achieves in appraisable action cannot be ignored in the evaluation of a man's total personality, it would be equally true to say that one could hardly assess what is most precious in the flowering of a personality by focussing one's attention exclusively on mere ponderables. Browning seized this when he asserted, if somewhat rhetorically:

"Thoughts hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped:  
All I could never be,  
All men ignored in me,  
This was I worth to God whose wheel the pitcher  
shaped."

Sri Aurobindo emphasized the same truth viewed from another angle—when he wrote to me once: “The ultimate value of a man is not to be measured by what he says, nor even by what he does, but by what he becomes.” Aldous Huxley underlined this very truth when he wrote that real knowledge is a function not of the intellect but of growth of the total personality. I have quoted these dicta with one sole purpose: to help us, moderns, to obviate a grievous error we constantly perpetrate when we assume *a priori* that we can appraise with Reason things of the Spirit: to wit, the error of concentrating rigorously on what the mind can measure and assay when it sets out to adjudicate in the realms of the deepest, that is, the mystic Truth. This error creeps in because, when the gaze is rivetted on what can be clearly seen by the mortal eye, it misses, necessarily, what authorises the seen phenomena: the ordaining Finger of the Unseen.

Sri Aurobindo never missed this because he had acquired the third eye, the *Shivanetra*, in the very initial stages of his *sadhana*. Hence he was accorded, to start with, the Vision which led him to claim the Boon. This Vision made him seek what only the authentic Avatar can dare to crave: the Boon of

The magic flowing waters of deep love  
 Along the mystic roads of Space and Time  
 To the experience which all Nature hides

This mighty Vision, to which we have been fortunately

invited, he has not, however, opened to us at one bold sweep. He takes us in hand, as it were, to lead us, step by step, along the way he has himself trod in his mystic discoveries expressed through his mantric messages. He had indeed hinted at these discoveries in his great prose but it was in the epic *Savitrī* that he first gave us the full Vision which opens, tier upon tier, in his thrilling poem till we arrive at the rapturous summit-view which came to Aswapathy, that "colonist from immortality" and "treasurer of superhuman dreams". I say "tier upon tier," as Sri Aurobindo, while expressing through Aswapathy some of his deepest experiences, has described in *Savitrī* how the inspiration came to him initially:

Oft inspiration with her lightning feet,  
A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,  
Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind  
Bringing her rhythmic sense of hidden things.

And what happened then?—

A music spoke transcending mortal speech.  
A joy of light, a joy of sudden sight,  
A rapture of the thrilled undying Word...  
A repetition of God's first delight.

And then

The inspiring goddess entered a mortal's breast...  
All was made wide above, all lit below.

And lastly,

One soul's ambition lifted up the race.

Such was Aswapathy, a poetic double of Sri Aurobindo, the great harbinger of a New Light to be manifested only through this great "aspirant to supernal Timelessness."

I must, however, pause here to qualify the statement about the "poetic double". In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo's message as well as aspiration is voiced not through Aswapathy alone but also through Narad, the Prophet, and Savitri, the final invoker of the New Gleam. I have given the priority to Aswapathy inasmuch as it was he who first appealed directly to the Divine, the World-Mother, to manifest her compassion on our famished earth:

O radiant fountain of the world's delight  
World-free and unattainable above,  
O Bliss who ever dwellest deep hid within  
While men seek thee outside and never find,  
Mystery and Muse with hieratic tongue,  
Incarnate the white passion of thy force,  
Mission to earth some living form of thee....  
Pack with the eternal might one human hour  
And with one gesture change all future time.  
Let a great word be spoken from the heights  
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.

But the Promise was to be redeemed only through Savitri, the "daughter of Infinity" and "priestess of immaculate



ecstasies" whose "mind, a sea of white sincerity, had not one turbid wave," who came equipped with "a heart of silence in the hands of joy" and

A body like a parable of dawn  
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity  
Or golden temple door to things beyond.

But this mighty world-redeemer was recognised as such not even by her own father Aswapathy or her mother, the Queen, but by Narad, "the heavenly sage from Paradise" who "passed from the immortals' happy path to a world of toil and quest and grief and hope," who

...sang the name of Vishnu and the birth  
And joy and passion of the mystic world,  
And how the stars were made and life began...  
And darkness yearning towards the eternal Light,  
And Love that broods within the dim abyss  
And waits the answer of the human heart,  
And death that climbs immortality.

It is difficult to describe the architectonics of *Savitri* in the span of a brief lecture. For *Savitri* is an epic with multitudinous notes and voices, alien and angelic, woven into a symphony of human destiny which is imposed by the law of Karma with its tardy evolution and, withal, redeemed by a supreme *tapasya* of challenging courage which refused to accept even the dread yoke of Yama, the

Lord of Death. So this humble lecture must be looked upon not as an elaborate exegesis but only as an invitation to those aspiring hearts which feel that there is an answering Heaven waiting the ardent call of the Earth and yet cannot, in their seeming helplessness, even dare to hope against hope because of the hopeless conditions of "mortality which bears ill the Eternal's touch", and the recalcitrance of "earth-nature" to any change for the better. That is why, if my audience will tolerate a little divagation, Shaw described in his 92nd year the profession of the "world-betterer" as doomed beyond all retrieving.

Those to whom the world-betterer's father in Shaw's *Buoyant Billions* genuflected as "practical men" will no doubt undersign the son's despair with alacrity. But in spite of the tragic state of this God-deriding world preferring the suicide of cynicism to redemption offered by the vision of faith, the world still breeds visionaries and mystics, seers and saints, prophets and avatars. That is why to the heart of Despond still comes the Voice from the heights of the Impossible-made-possible which guarantees that:

If human will could be made one with God's  
Man might be all-knowing and omnipotent.

For, although it is true that

...now he walks in Nature's doubtful ray,

yet, there *is* a possibility, a divine potentiality lying latent

in this very poor specimen which can help him transcend his seeming impotence, doubting and stumbling, till

...can the mind of man receive God's light,

and

The force of man can be driven by God's Force.

Not that there are not reasons a-plenty which can and do make even the angels weep, in the spectacle of rampant suffering born of man's ineradicable attachment to his congenital blindness, the root of all his misery, pain and deep-seated frustration. But this, however damning in itself, cannot invalidate what the Seer has *seen* from his more evolved consciousness (and more trustworthy because it is more evolved):

This world was not built with random bricks of  
chance,

A blind God is not destiny's architect;

A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,

There is a meaning in each curve and line.

But the world we know and see hardly encourages us to have any helpful faith in world-betterers, mystic, scientific or humanitarian. Sri Aurobindo is, indeed, in agreement with the sceptics here though not for their reasons. What he seems to hint at is:

A prayer, a master act, a king idea  
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force,  
Then miracle is made the common rule...  
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.

In other words, he wants to bring the miraculous to bear on our inertia and supine mediocrity. And this he wants, nay, claims because he has seen what he has seen:

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers  
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life  
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth...  
Out of the paths of the morning star they came  
Into the little room of mortal life.  
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,  
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,  
The great creators with wide brows of calm,  
The massive barrier-breakers of the world...  
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,...  
The architects of immortality.

And it is not his own private vision alone on which he bases his mighty hope. For did not the World-Mother assure him:

A radiant purpose still conceals its face,  
A mighty blindness stumbles hoping on,  
Feeding its strength on gifts of luminous Chance.  
Because the human instrument has failed,



The Godhead frustrate sleeps within its seed,  
A spirit entangled in the forms it made.  
His failure is not failure whom God leads.

Which is not to say, however, that his vision amounts in the end to that of a mere optimist. For Sri Aurobindo believes in the Unseen not because he is blind to the grim reality that pens the human heart beating its bleeding wings against the cage of Destiny, but because he has seen what the worldlings have not sighted. And what he *has* seen he has thought fit to bring into a radiant relief against the wan background of life, as beheld by the common eye—the grim spectacle of Destiny mourned by the Queen in the Book of Fate, Canto I:

For nothing have we learned, but still repeat  
Our stark misuse of self and others' selves  
And fallen from his ethereal element  
Love darkens to the spirit of nether Gods.

The hard stark reality is depressing enough in all conscience. For who will dare deny that not only do our "days" prove "links of a disastrous chain", so that "old cruelties come back unrecognised", but is not man, at bottom, a mere feckless creature?—

An ill-armed warrior facing dreadful odds,  
An imperfect worker given a baffling task,  
An ignorant judge of problems ignorance made,

Its heavenward flights reach closed and keyless gates,  
Its glorious outbursts peter out in mire.

Sri Aurobindo has been at great pains to delineate the sorry plight of fate-ridden humanity from two distinct standpoints. The passage just quoted is uttered by the Queen, Savitri's mother, who is disconsolate because her daughter, a Princess, is set on linking her life to that of a pauper, Satyavan, who is, besides, doomed to die in twelve months. But he views the world's tragedy from a deeper standpoint as well, namely, from that of Awsapathy, the great aspirant, whose "soul of flame" cannot consent to

...rest content with mortal days  
And the dull measure of terrestrial things,

because he has

...seen behind the cosmic mask  
The glory and the beauty of thy face!

and therefore refuses to acquiesce fatalistically in the tardy pace of human evolution. His indomitable soul has to cry out for the great Fulfilment to come here and now and so he sighs:

Hard is the doom to which thou bindst thy sons!

And he goes on to ask somewhat impatiently because his love has emboldened him to be intolerant:

How long shall our spirits battle with the Night  
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,  
We who are vessels of a deathless Force  
And builders of the godhead of the race?

And then begins an astonishing challenge:

Or if it is thy work I do below  
Amid the error and waste of human life  
In the vague light of man's half-conscious mind,  
Why breaks not in some distant gleam of thee?

The "gleam" is, indeed, distant, for—as he goes on in a mounting crescendo:

Ever the centuries and millenniums pass.  
Where in the greyness is thy coming's ray?  
Where is the thunder of thy victory's wings?  
Only we hear the feet of passing gods...  
All we have done is ever still to do.  
All breaks and all renews and is the same.  
Huge revolutions of life's fruitless gyre,  
The new-born ages perish like the old.

Of course he cannot possibly belong to the ilk of Shavian world-betterers who have not glimpsed anything beyond what trickles to the sight of the purblind rationalist; for has he not seen the Face of the Destiny-maker and heard his Voice which impels him to attest:

I know that thy creation cannot fail.

and so knows, to a certainty, that

This strange irrational product of the mire,  
This compromise between the beast and God,  
Is not the crown of thy miraculous world.

as also that

...there shall inform the inconscient cells,  
At one with Nature and at height with Heaven,  
A spirit vast as the containing sky  
And swept with ecstasy from the invisible founts,  
A God come down and greater by the fall.

Yes, Sri Aurobindo must come to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear as a somewhat refreshing paradox among the mystics. For he is at once an ancient and a modern, a conformist and a dissident—in one word, a realist and a “dreamer of superhuman dreams” which are dreams and yet signals, flashed from the Beyond, of what is pre-ordained: the apocalypse which will transform this “tardy limp of the hours” and the ineradicable slowness of manifestation which has been the despair even of the most authentic world-betterers, the despair which does, in effect, prompt them to wail:

Too little the strength that now with us is born,  
Too faint the light that steals through Nature's lids,



Too scant the joy with which she buys our pain...  
A foiled immortal soul in perishing limbs,  
Baffled and beaten back we labour still.

Ever waiting and labouring, alas, in vain,

...that from us may rise  
A larger-seeing man with nobler heart,  
A golden vessel of the incarnate Truth,  
The executor of the divine attempt  
Equipped to wear the earthly body of God,  
Communicant and prophet and lover and king.

A mere optimist can have no possible truck with such thoughts. He will simply brush aside the grim reality as an illusion and seek his solace in the extra-cosmic lap of the Hereafter. But Sri Aurobindo's vision is vast and keen. He is not thankful for small mercies. So he can at best accept but never welcome pain which is to him merely a temporary device needed in the transitional stage when the human wallows in his humanity and yet wants to transcend it and be divinised.

But the pain *is* a hard reality whatever the Illusionist may say. Of all the ancient doctrines of the other-worldly sages the doctrine of Maya appeals to Sri Aurobindo the least. To him this earth is not a phantom stage where meaningless plays of "blood and sweat and tears" are produced to no purpose save that of making men groan in agony under the dread yoke of Destiny. So he has to accept

pain and suffering but only to discover this secret purpose working as an invisible leaven in the heart of pain:

Pain is the hammer of the gods to break  
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart...  
Pain is the hand of Nature sculpturing men  
To greatness: an inspired labour chisels  
With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould.

And that is why

The great who came to save the suffering world  
And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law  
Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain.

Is it any wonder then that the world-redeemer in all  
climes and ages should have passed through what he did?—

Gethsemane and Calvary are his lot,  
He carries the cross on which man's soul is nailed.  
His escort is the curses of the crowd.

But still God *is* and cannot be mocked, destined by his  
own ordaining to triumph through His very defeats, to be  
crowned through His crucifixion.

He who has found his identity with God  
Pays with the body's death his soul's vast light.  
His knowledge immortal triumphs by his death.

Hewn, quartered on the scaffold as he falls  
His crucified voice proclaims: "I, I am God;"  
"Yes, all is God," peals back Heaven's deathless call.  
The seed of Godhead sleeps in mortal hearts,  
The flower of Godhead grows on the world-tree:  
All shall discover God in self and things,  
But when God's messenger comes to help the world  
And lead the soul of earth to higher things,  
He too must carry the yoke he came to unloose;  
He too must bear the pang that he would heal.  
Exempt and unafflicted by earth's fate  
How shall he cure the ills he never felt?

But though this may be accepted as a consolation, one cannot contemplate such a state of affairs with equanimity. No. Suffering, in Sri Aurobindo's vision, is not a boon, even though pain may be transmuted up to a point and in the measure that it is so utilised it may be made use of as a skyward step in life's uphill pilgrimage, but, when all is said, pain is by no means a consummation devoutly to be wished, least of all death before its hour. For man, according to Sri Aurobindo, has not been sent here to go on suffering pointlessly and sobbing endlessly, any more than the God-hostile forces can be tolerated by God-lovers. But alas, one cannot remedy the canker before experiencing the scourge. That is why even the sons of God have to accept pain and vicarious atonement for all as a cross, submitting to the Divine and, if need be, consenting even to the supreme sacrifice demanded of the world-redeemers

in every age: the martyrhood of death. Sri Aurobindo's outlook on this supreme tragedy is inspiring both in its nobility and profundity:

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task,  
The world itself becomes his adversary,  
His enemies are the beings he came to save.  
Those he would save are his antagonists.

For the simple reason that

This world is in love with its own ignorance,  
Its darkness turns away from the saviour light,  
It gives the cross in payment for the crown.  
His work is a trickle of splendour in a long night;  
He sees the long march of Time, the little won;  
A few are saved, the rest strive on and fail.

How these "few are going to gain ground, how the gain is going to be consolidated—with the sons of God fighting every inch of their climb—till the trickle of light shall swell to a veritable downpour are only hinted at in *Savitri* somewhat reticently, as in the last great couplet of the Gita:

*Sarvadharmā parityajya mamekaṁ śaranam braja:*

*Ahaṁ twaṁ sarvāpāṇebhyaḥ mokṣayishyāmi na śuṇha.*

("Abandon all the accepted codes of conduct and take final refuge in Me alone and I will absolve thy sins: have no misgivings.")



I will not there expatiate on what is beyond our ken, because on matters such as these only those who have reached the Goal can speak. We can, indeed, as Guru Nanak has stressed again and again, say that what the Messiah proclaims we believe to be true, but we cannot presume to attest something as true till we have realised or seen it as true. So I would not venture to rush in where the greatest among us have chosen deliberately to be silent so far, to wit, presume to indicate *when* the last laurels of Immortality are going to be won, nay, not even dare to speculate what Immortality truly means. Those who would have more light on this deep enigma had better be referred to Sri Aurobindo's own messages, born throbbing and radiant out of his own vision derived from a life-time of superhuman *sadhana*, and notably to his mantric prophecy in *Savitri* in the soul-stirring *Book of Everlasting Day*. For there he has thrillingly described how Savitri wrests the Boon of boons from the Lord of Destiny by forcing the hand of Death and thus conquering Destiny: Satyavan had to die to be subsequently reclaimed—but after what incredible ordeals!

But then why talk even of ordeals since, however hard may be the World-redeemer's task, he—as a Divine Representative on earth—is sent to uplead us, earthlings, to Divinity by daring what none but a Divine Deputy, an avatar, can dare. We—the rest, who are born not to lead but to follow the Finger of Light—can play our role best through a real seeking, humble but sincere, remembering with gratitude that in this world of cruelty and calamity

still under the sway of the Despot, Darkness, great Liberators are still empowered, as Heralds of an ever-deepening Light and as miracle Minstrels, to sing, in the heart of din, of Harmony and transmit to us, feeble mortals, the supreme Pledge of "the One of the colour of the Sun, stationed beyond the Darkness," who supports all true aspiration. For it is He Himself who has chosen to make our Messiah convey to us His promise of the inevitable Fulfilment, the Boon which accrued to him from his Vision in a vibrant Prophecy that cannot fail:

A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world...  
 The superman shall reign as king of life,  
 Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven  
 And lead towards God and truth man's ignorant heart  
 And lift towards godhead his mortality.  
 A power released from circumscribing bounds,  
 Its heights pushed up beyond death's hungry reach,  
 Life's tops shall flame with the Immortal's thoughts,  
 Light shall invade the darkness of its base.  
 Then in the process of evolving Time  
 All shall be drawn into a single plan,  
 A divine harmony shall be earth's law,  
 Beauty and Joy remould her way to live:  
 Even the body shall remember God,  
 Nature shall draw back from mortality  
 And Spirit's fires shall guide the earth's blind force;  
 Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought  
 A high proximity to Truth and God.

The supermind shall claim the world for Light  
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart  
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head  
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Advaita</i>	the One without a second, beyond duality; monism.
<i>Advaitic</i>	monistic.
<i>Ahuti</i>	offering in fire.
<i>Akshara</i>	the relationless Divine; the Absolute.
<i>Ananda</i>	spiritual bliss; beatitude.
<i>Anandamaya</i>	blissful.
<i>Atman, ātmā</i>	Self, the Soul.
<i>Anātman</i>	not-Self.
<i>Ashram</i>	a community of aspirants pursuing a common ideal.
<i>Avatār</i>	an incarnation of the Divine in the human Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter: "An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action so that he feels identified inwardly with this Divine power and presence."
<i>Bhāgavat</i>	the Bible of the Vaishnavas containing an account of the doings of Sri Krishna.
<i>Bhakta</i>	devotee.
<i>Bhakti</i>	devotion.



<i>Brahman</i> or <i>Brahma</i>	the spiritual reality universal and supreme.
<i>Bhāva</i>	the idea behind; the associations.
<i>Brahmajñāna</i>	knowledge of Brahman through identity.
<i>Dharma</i>	the law of one's being; the essential quality of character of a person or thing.
<i>Darshan</i>	seeing, a glimpse (vide Preface).
<i>Dakshināyana</i>	the path of karma which leads to rebirth as against Uttarayana (vide the Gita, 8. 24-25).
<i>Deva</i>	God.
<i>Devi</i>	Goddess
<i>Dhyāna</i>	meditation, concentration.
<i>Goloka</i>	the Eternal Habitat of Lord Vishnu.
<i>Guru</i>	the Master, spiritual preceptor.
<i>Guruvāda</i>	the doctrine that the Guru, acting as the Vicegerent of the Divine, has the same status as the Divine's.
<i>Gurubhai</i>	co-disciple, that is, disciple of the same Guru and as such a spiritual brother.
<i>Ishta</i>	the particular Form of God which a devotee feels impelled to worship.
<i>Japa</i>	repetition of a sacred name (of God or Guru) or simply a phrase, generally counselled by the Guru.
<i>Jñāna</i>	knowledge especially of the spiritual love.

<i>Jñānamārga</i>	the path of Jnana followed by an aspirant.
<i>Kālī</i>	the Goddess who conquers demon obstacles.
<i>Karma</i>	works, action as also the resultant force of what has been done in the past or in one's past births.
<i>Karma-yoga</i>	the system of spiritual discipline which takes works (dedicated to the Divine) as its basis.
<i>Kavi</i>	poet.
<i>Krishna</i>	The Supreme incarnated as a human being (in the epic age of the Mahabharata) who taught the Gita.
<i>Līlā</i>	play (of the Divine).
<i>Māyā</i>	illusion.
<i>Māyāvāda</i>	illusionism, the doctrine that cosmic life is a maya.
<i>Māyāvādi</i>	one who holds the view of mayavada.
<i>Mantra</i>	a motto, a holy name or phrase which one repeats to win something one desires.
<i>Moksha</i>	final liberation from the bondage of birth.
<i>Nāmarūpa</i>	name and form.
<i>Nirākāra</i>	formless.
<i>Nirvāna</i>	spiritual extinction of the separate individual self.

<i>Nishkāma</i>	without desires, disinterested, dispassionate.
<i>Ojas</i>	energy, courage.
<i>Paradharma</i> <i>Prakriti</i>	what is contrary to one's own dharma. Nature, the active and executive Energy as distinguished from Purusha.
<i>Purusha</i>	the soul or conscious being supporting the action of Nature.
<i>Prāyopaveshana</i>	a vow of fasting unto death unless and until what one wants is accorded.
<i>Prasād</i> <i>Purāna</i>	food offered to and accepted by the Gods or the Guru. the Ancient, the everlasting.
<i>Rajas</i>	the kinetic principle in Nature which translates itself through desire, action, pride, passions of the ego.
<i>Rājasic</i> <i>Rishi</i> <i>Retas</i>	energetic, active. seer, sage. semen.
<i>Sachchidānanda</i>	the Divine with His three cardinal attributes: sat=existence, chit=consciousness, ananda=bliss.
<i>Sādhana</i> <i>Sādhaka</i> <i>Sādhika</i> <i>Siddhi</i>	practice of discipline for God-realisation. a man who takes to sadhana. a woman who takes to sadhana. realisation, fulfilment.

<i>Siddha</i>	one who has attained siddhi.
<i>Samādhi</i>	spiritual trance in which mystical experiences come.
<i>Samskāras</i>	fixed mental formations; impressions of past habits and experiences stored up in the subconscious parts.
<i>Sanmyāsi</i>	an ascetic who has left the world for God.
<i>Saraswati</i>	the Goddess of learning and music.
<i>Sattva</i>	the principle of light and harmony and serenity.
<i>Sāttvic</i>	serene, harmonious.
<i>Shāstras</i>	scriptures, holy books.
<i>Shiva</i>	the Lord of non-attachment as also of death.
<i>Shakti</i>	power, dynamis; consort of Shiva and as such power in woman which inspires and sustains man.
<i>Swabhāva</i>	the <i>bhava</i> or nature native to one; congenital temperament.
<i>Swadharma</i>	the dharma native to one; the law of one's being.
<i>Tamas</i>	the principle of obscurity and inertia in Nature.
<i>Tāmasic</i>	inert, indolent.
<i>Tapasya</i>	spiritual effort by concentration of the energies in a spiritual discipline or process.



- Vairāgya* earth-aversion; distaste for worldly things.
- Vaishnava* a follower of Krishna or His archetype, Lord Vishnu.
- Vedānta* the system of philosophy and spiritual discipline in accordance with the *Book of Knowledge* that forms the latter portion of the Vedas (the oldest Indian spiritual scriptures) the earlier portion being known as the *Book of Works*.
- Vedāntic* pertaining to Vedanta.
- Vedāntin* one who follows the Vedanta philosophy and sadhana.
- Vibhuti* Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter: "A Vibhuti is supposed to embody some power of the Divine and is enabled by it to act with great force in the world, but that is all that is necessary to make him a Vibhuti: the power may be very great but the consciousness is not that of an inborn or indwelling Divinity.
- Vedas* the most authoritative scriptures, the Bible of the Hindus.
- Yoga* union with the Divine; the discipline by which one enters through an awakening into an inner and higher consciousness.
- Yogic* pertaining to Yoga.

<i>Yogin, Yogi</i>	one who practises the Yoga.
<i>Yoga-nidrā</i>	the great conscious sleep of the Yogi in which he stays in union with the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo had to employ some English words in a somewhat new sense to explain certain experiences. Among these only five need be included in this glossary as they occur frequently in his letters quoted in this book.

1) *The psychic being* by which he means the Purusha in the heart which supports by its presence the action of the mind, life and body. It is the conscious form of the soul. "The psychic part of us," he writes in a letter, "is something that comes direct from the Divine and is in touch with divine possibilities that supports the lower triple manifestation of mind, life and body....It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements, there is developed a psychic individuality which we call usually the psychic being." He has often used the adjective *psychic* to mean this higher movement. Sometimes he has used the *psychic* as an abbreviation omitting *being*.

2) *The vital being* by which he means the being behind life-force. He writes in one of his letters: "There are four parts of the vital being—first the *mental vital* which gives a mental expression by thought, speech or otherwise to the emotions, desires, passions, sensations and other movements of the vital being." Those who would know more

about his classification must be referred to the first volume of his Letters! We need be concerned here only with his definition of two more of these.

*The higher vital* by which he means "that larger movement of the conscious life-force which is concerned with creation, with power and force and conquest, with giving and self-giving...throwing itself out in the wider movements of life, responsive to the greater objects of Nature.

*The lower vital* by which he implies "the pettier movements of action and desire" such as "all physical sensations, hungers, cravings, satisfactions...lusts, greed of all kinds, vanity, small ambitions, petty anger, envy, jealousy" etc.



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